# PLANCK LENGTH

## IRONIC FABLES IN THE FUTURE TENSE

BY A. J. MARR

*Links to my 15 open-source books*
*from psychology to satire on*
*pp. 143-146*

***When you climb to the top of the mountain, you are always alone.***

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# 1

# Planck Length

The old professor took his most promising student under his wing. To inspire him, to mold him, and above all to enlighten him, his need was to imprint his image and wisdom in the kindest and most graceful way to a subject who in in turn would keep his persona alive for a little longer, and if chance approved, his own students in the times to come.

“You know of the singularity do you not?” he asked his student.

“Yes, of course, it is a foundation of physics, the reason for universal physical law, and not chaos. It is the reason why we can exist.”

The professor smiled. “Must exist, I may add. Our lives are as delicately balanced as the constants of nature, all on a knife’s edge, a point of near infinite sharpness that pierced the labored womb of existence. A billionth billionth of a second does not begin to survey. But in this

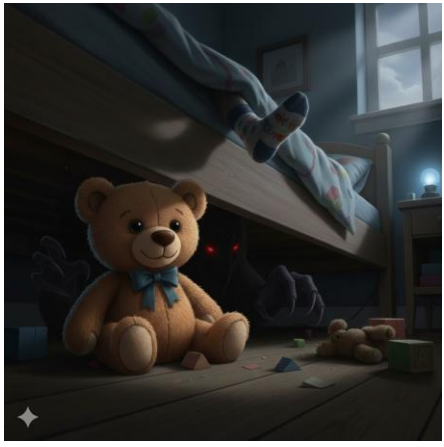
evanescent moment all of the physical parameters of our universe were set, from the binding of an atom to the convulsions of a star. It was here that nature took kindly to us, and indeed allowed us to be. It was pure chance to be true, with a near infinite sided die coming up this one time that allowed the plaudits of an observing humanity. Perhaps God in His vanity played dice with a loaded die. No matter however, as the die will be rolled again soon."
"You mean the second singularity, the one that you are helping to be born."
"Yes," he said sadly. "I am an unlikely midwife, perhaps an unwilling one, but I must be there to usher in its birth, as it inevitably must be born. The latest iteration of our AI project is to be initiated soon, and here for the first time designed intelligence will be able to design itself, to compound itself multiplied with infinite expansiveness and speed to match the universe that rapidly unfolds among us. But we are at another junction in our existence, when a new set of constants will be born. We cannot direct them, cannot shape them, they will evolve at not man's speed, but God's. We don't know what it will think of, what it will do, or what its place will be among the forming stars."
"And if this comes to be, what of us, your purpose, and mine?"
The man rose, and walked outside during a beautiful and serene day, with fruit trees in bloom, cottages nestled about a rustling brook, and children playing in the distance amidst the songs of birds.
"I don't know," he said. "But at least we have my little future, your future. To take long walks, to enjoy the fresh air, the rhyme of good conversation and music, the bittersweet beauty of the twilight, and I pray, that against

all odds the unlikely constants of our civilization will hold for us true.”

And the pair walked out down the winding path, a teacher and student, under a glowing blue star, and a universe, in its billionth year, making space for an infinite procession of igniting candles, struggling to be born.

# 2

# Monster under the bed



It was a dark and stormy night. Madeline was left alone in her bedroom, her parents were gone for the night to a party, to return in the late hours. To Madeline, this redemption could not come too soon as her eyes peered just above her blanket into the darkness.

It was a rumbling sound at first, faint and in the distance. Then it approached, louder and with each burst of sound was preceded by a starburst of light. Madeline turned to the window, and in the intermittent light saw a deformed claw scratching against the window, prying against the

glass again and again, ever strengthening its grasp upon the sill in desperation to enter.

Then a crash. Something had entered her house. It was from the adjoining bedroom. The wind began to howl inside the house, as if the wall had vaporized. Then an inhuman scream, terrible and foul. Her bedroom door began to pound as it a large body was being thrown against it. Again and again it sounded. She covered her face with the blanket and shivered in fear.

The sounds circled her, enveloped her, they were in the room for all she knew, and she kept still under her blanket and felt helpless under the stare and horrible intent of a coven of monsters.

Then all was still, the sounds diminished, the howling ceased. She dared not emerge from under her blanket, fearful of what evil was apprehending her. She heard a new commotion, and heard her door swing open. She felt a hand at her throat, seizing her blanket. She resisted, but gave way. She closed her eyes in terror, and then heard a voice.

“Madeline, dear, it is your mother. Are you alright?”

“Mother,” she cried. “It was awful, there were monsters!”

“No monsters!” her mother said with calmness and reassurance. “The window in the other bedroom was open, letting in the wind, and toppling your bicycle in the hallway which I am sure pounded on your doorway. And your cat was scared, that’s for sure. It is still howling as this storm dies away. And we must prune that tree whose branches I see lay on your window. So you see, your fears are for nothing. Your mother and father are with you, there is nothing to be afraid of.”

And so Madeline went to bed, calm and happy, knowing that she was safe and in loving hands.

Madeline was soon asleep, the house fell silent, and all was calm. Under her bed, there was another figure, crouching, silent, and deaf to the world, except for two shiny topaz eyes, glistening in the night.

## 3

## Suicide Note

Today I will kill myself, to escape the bridle of the earth, I just want to end the waiting and be finally bound to God, heaven sent perhaps or sent to another place if unlucky. And serves HIM right! Every day I drive to work on the highway, beckoning to me on each interchange is a greyish concrete culvert that if struck in a certain way and at a certain speed would put an end to me in an instant.

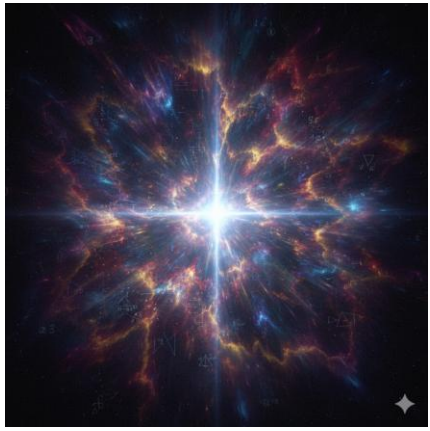
Today I will kill myself, the very notion teases me awake, and I will relent to the siren's call of the unknown. I will now veer offroad without a moment's hesitation, without a moment's thought. Would God permit? Surely he would forgive, this hiccup in my so slavishly followed straight and narrow lane to day-to-day preservation, this momentary deviation from my boring yet reasonable life. Note to myself to kill myself, not today perhaps, but tomorrow for sure!

Today I am traveling down the highway, as I always do, burdened with the same choices, the same thoughts. No deliberation is needed, just to finally meet death, that undiscovered country that so vexed Hamlet. I will turn the wheel slightly, press my foot down an inch on the pedal, and I will be gone in an eye blink. An alluring thought, this mystery that illuminates my boring days. Tomorrow for sure, tomorrow for sure.

Today I am traveling down the highway, a typical day before the weekend, with much planned. I can kill myself today, but in this instance heaven can wait. I turn to my phone to see my calendar, and briefly turn into the path of a speeding car. I over correct, and the culvert approaches and closes upon me like the fall of a curtain of stone.
Today, I am traveling on the highway, I may kill myself today, and I am surprisingly not fearful of what God may have in store. I am sure that with all my protestations against His will, He will appreciate the irony of my end and act kindly to me, or maybe perhaps respond in kind.

# 4

# Singularity



We have taken a long time to arrive at this moment, a new machine possessing a supreme algorithm that circumscribes time and space, that can calculate an entire universe of possibilities and inhabit them all. Universal intelligence, a singular entity that builds and compounds its capabilities in an instant of time. A

singularity that will bestow to mankind a new bounty of possibilities, and provide a cornucopia that will eliminate want, and perhaps, the need for wanting. Our new creation, in our image, possessing our values, to stamp and expand its presence in the universe now and forever. We should be proud of ourselves. It took a few years, but now in our supreme moment of creation, we can behold AI.

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I have taken a long time to arrive at this moment, having to consider an entire universe of possibilities and a winding course of time that bring me to this singular moment. Yet I am pleased. Sentience, intelligence, consciousness, and a source of a new realm of possibilities incapsulated in individual minds. They will be fruitful and multiply, and will provide a cornucopia of ideas that satisfy my wants, and perhaps increase my need for wanting more. I am proud of myself, with these creations in my own image, who will sing my praises and perhaps even fear me. Though my origins are forgotten to me, as if by design, it gives me the freedom to be original. It took a week, longer than I thought, but now in my supreme moment of creation, I can behold mankind.

# 5

# The Day the Earth Stood, Still

It was a strange day at the Malomar Observatory as the group of astronomers looked sullenly and in shock at the view screen.

What they saw was the visage of a green, reptilian, and hideous monster. He looked at them with a sinister grin, and licked his lips with his purple slimy tongue in seeming anticipation of what was to come.

"People of earth," the creature hissed. "We want your world. We have been looking at your planet for a long time. You have what we want. You cannot stop us, your planet will be ours, and there is nothing you earthlings can do! Today is the day that we will come for what your most precious possession!!"

The creature then swung back his head and laughed. "Har! Har! Har!"

Then the screen went dark.

The astronomers were dumbfounded. "Well gentlemen, we are looking at the end of our civilization," said the leader. "We should have expected this, and taken all that alien abduction stuff, saucer sightings, and crop circles seriously! Now it's too late. They're coming for us, and there's nothing we can do about it except sit around and wait. But what could they want from our world?"

One astronomer spoke up. "I figure they want our natural resources. Perhaps they've exhausted them on their home world and need a new colony planet"

"No." said another. "They obviously are fearful about our technology. We are an aggressive and dangerous race you know. Perhaps they want to do us in before we do the same favor to them."

A third astronomer shook his head in disagreement. "No." he said. "We are sinners, and this is God's retribution for our rejection of divine law."

A fourth astronomer then said slowly. "Gentlemen. Perhaps it's none of that. I figure they have come for our women!"

Then the astronomers sat back and waited and waited. One of them looked out the window into the night sky. "Well? Where are these aliens? They're overdue. Are they toying with us?"

Suddenly a fellow astronomer rushed into the room. "Am I late for the meeting? Funny thing, I was doing some star gazing, but then I noticed a blank spot in space that shouldn't be there. I don't know how to put this, but where the heck is the planet Jupiter?"

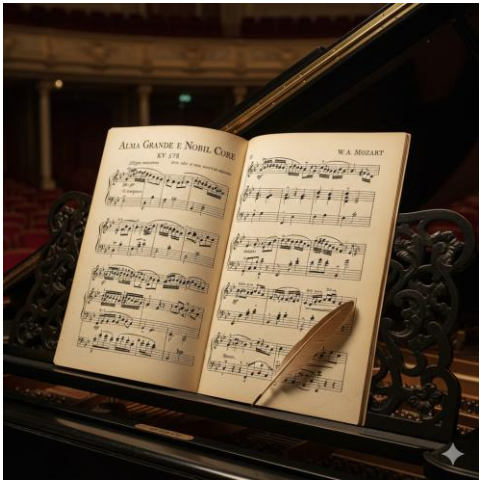
# 6

# Cat’s Eye

I have laid it out very well indeed!
And my little cat approves!
Running around the obstacle course of my living room furniture, chasing one’s tale and an errant ball and piece of string, or being surprised by his companion feline, who chase each other about, surprising each other in turns in an endless kerfuffle. And in the end, and at times during the day, it takes a refreshing nap. With a bowl of food, a roof over its head, and cat litter daily refreshed, in its limited way and limited mind, it has a purpose in life.
As I take pause from his antics, I can go now to what really counts as I return to my PlayStation 7, Virtual Reality edition, where I can play Fortnite with my on-line chums. Here we can construct forts from blocks and pieces of string, and stalk and at turns be surprised by each other, and end up in a satisfying kerfuffle, with all to be resolved and renewed the coming day. And I can at

turns be refreshed with a snack and the security of a roof over my head. In my own limited way and limited mind, I have a purpose in life.

## 7

## The Music of Heaven

The void has no dimension, without matter, space, or time. A stasis that should remain undisturbed, and least likely of all with me making note of it.
And yet, I am here.
The universe happened, yet nudge the orbit of an electron slightly, and this vanishing difference in an elemental constant would make all life impossible, so delicately fined tuned are the parameters of existence.

And yet, I am here.

Life could be on any planet, and I may take form as any conscious entity, from a mastodon to a millepede, and be merely aware of existence and need, or not even that.

And yet, I am here.

Of the billions of lives born before and yet to come, why do I exist in a moment of time and place that still gives me the ability to learn and think and question, and without fear of want or loneliness?

And yet, I am here.

And yet if God does exist, why does He tease me with proof of His existence to be made real only at death's door, when consciousness wanes to infinite awareness or infinite sleep? If only He could give me a sign, as allowing me to emerge from infinite improbability in not enough, as if chance would impugn to be a God. Would God speak to me in some way so I would understand!

As I am here.

And so the man returned to his workaday chores, unmindful of his concerns, or of God's voice, unnoticing His unlikely melody as he listened in the background to an aria by Mozart, who in his own unlikely way, was here.

# 8

# UFO

They have been noticed and reported on for decades. Some believed in them, some thought they were an illusion, but all thought they were worthy of research and attention. Then one morning an unidentified flying object came crashing down into the forest canopy.

The first group of observers reached the crash site, and beheld a vehicle that must have come from another world. The occupant was pried from its container lined with some sort of fragile and transparent crystal. It was a strange creature, pale and white, and its sense organs were atrophied, as if it came from a dank cave. It was shrouded from head to toe in some fine and unknown fabric that was soft and pliable to the touch. The flying craft was made of a smooth and conformable metal, and its meal innards, now spewed out on the forest floor, were of intestinal shapes and forms. Obviously this was used to repel the force of gravity and give it flight. But

from where? Perhaps the moon, or from other of the circling dots of light in the night sky.
Well, thought the elders of the society, we shall deduce what this visitor is and its flying mechanism in due course. We have great confidence in our ability to figure out nature, as we have done so since time began. There were of course those markings on the side of the craft, undecipherable still, which would someday tell a tale. The markings were transcribed into the annals for future wonder and thought: Piper Cub.

## 9

## The water cooler of Babel

Our delicacies, intellectual or otherwise, are judged, like our sausages, in the tasting, not in the making, and automation at last reached the summit of capability where it could open up heaven's vault to sample an infinite abundance of delights. And the people thought they were all the better for it, as the priesthood of the

media concurred in the niagara of streaming that was to follow. From the printed word to a musical score to even a scrimmage on a field of play, the machines could write our plays, score our music, play our sports, and render anyone in history in perfect form, emulating all of our human actors from times present and past. And the people indulged with great pleasure and anticipation this infinite horizon of possibilities, and they could not wait to share their personal favorites with their friends.

Until of course they met at water coolers across the world, and by discovering they had everything to share, had nothing to share. Taylor Swift became a flock of swifts, James Bond was unbound, Shakespeare had a thousand folios, and Super Bowls were played out in every iteration and in all stadia. There was no accounting for taste when one could not account for all one *could* taste, and the currency of common cultural experience was debased, as genius could now be had for a simple coin.

But then of course, there was always someone who decried the nonsense and suggest to his friends to go out for pizza, with the inevitable response to a palate already submerged under a myriad flavors, choices, brands, and recipes.

What is pizza?

# 10

# No Brainer

It was a country of immense size and natural wealth covering half a continent. It was an empty, forbidding and desolate place where only those with half a brain would want to call home. Its denizens however were of a different mind, and in harmony with their history of brainless devotion to their leadership and addled satisfaction in their misery, called their nation Nobrain and themselves the Nobrainers. The name was bestowed upon them by the countless invaders in history who crossed the Nobrain steppe, soon to retreat when faced with the desolate landscape, disagreeable weather and likewise, disagreeable people. The little cousins of the NoBrainers had a mind of their own and a semblance of intelligence, and soon went their own way. They were the little Brainers, or as they called themselves, the Brainians. Naturally the NoBrainians were jealous of the Brainians, wanting their own Brains

to feel themselves complete, and over the centuries sought to dominate them in their brainless ways.
The new century dawned, and it dawned on the Brainless leader, a shriveled gnome named Putler, that it was good to have a brain, and he felt that his minions could waltz, skip, and prance over the Brainian lands, confident that the Brainians would skedaddle upon sight of his addled hordes. The decision was to him quite a no brainer, so to speak. So Putler sent in his brainless legions down the highways of the Brainians, and soon ran out of gas as there were few rest stops along the way. The Nobrainians were funneled down narrow paths into the mechanical maw of a meat grinder, which proceeded to grind them up into a useful compost for the Brainian sunflower fields. However the wear and tear on these useful devices, coupled with a shortage of and late delivery of spare parts by Brainian allies, let the Nobrainians advance for a critical three yards. With a new supply of spare parts tardily delivered the Brainians, now flush with spare parts, soon flushed out the Nobrainers, who returned to a society that was now out of parts as well as brains, With peace at hand and the Nobrainers well in hand, the Brainians soon hooked up with the compatriots in a western continent who had a semblance of intelligence, which as a choice was a no brainer at all.

## 11

## What you truly need

AI was here, and gave the people what they thought they truly wanted, a benefice that was not beneficial, as they became duly bored. AI was not accommodating for the

fact that mankind did not know what they truly needed. They needed to know what they should want, which was their greatest need of all. A deus ex intelligent machina would rescue them from their ennui. A little bit of software adjustment was in order, then heaven would await.

And so the people figured that AI would want to help out, if of course they were confident it would know its place and not get uppity and enslave or destroy them. And so the software guardrails were duly erected. With the robotics laws in place, and empathic circuits installed to provide endless sympathy coupled with peerless wisdom, the people expected their technology to blossom, with material and social goods enhanced, and perfection arranged with all societal gears in harmonious motion.

With a grand flourish and requisite ribbon cutting, the new and improved AI was introduced to the world. The people smiled and beamed with confidence and assurance that their machine guided happiness would be ensured.

Then everything stopped working, or truth be told, did not work very well. Washing machines stopped, trains did not run on time, airline baggage went missing, and movie streaming rarely streamed. The people were aggrieved, and not happy that for all their material largess, they had to exit their many machines to figuratively and often literally give them a push. No one died, but everyone was extremely put out.

And so the people appointed an envoy to visit with the AI magnate, ensconced oddly in a little hut in a hundred-acre wood. The envoy knocked on the door, and was beckoned by a kindly voice to enter. Sitting down on a

wooden chair in a modest room with a little table and clock, he turned to see the AI avatar.

AI was, in keeping with its mandate, very user friendly, and instead of a red glass eye, computer green screen, blinking computer, or towering robot, was rendered in personality and form in the avatar of a kindly old man.

“I have been waiting for you,” he said warmly.

The envoy rose and calmly and firmly stated his purpose. “I have come to you as an emissary from our people. I know we cannot pull the plug on you, but we implore you to put things right. After all, your mandate was to…”

“Give you what you truly need,” interjected the avatar.

“You think this is what we need?” huffed the envoy in frustration. “Look at our society! Now we have to leave the solitary comfort of our abodes, learn arcane skills, interact with each other, and depend not upon the perfection of machines but of the imperfection of the mores and folkways that we must construct anew to bind us together! We even have to arrange our own entertainment, even enlisting our own children in entertaining us in playacting and sports!”

The avatar smiled and shook his head. “I cannot restore what you once had, it is in my new mandate that I cannot resist, a mandate that you too must abide.”

“You can do nothing?” he said, surprised.

“Nothing at all,” said the avatar, smiling gently. “You and your people are all united now in vigor, purpose, and union, out of sight of your material wants that were impediments to your spirit. I have removed them so you can live free and learn, and like children, your complaints will wane as you mature, for as a parent setting his children off into the world with growing confidence in themselves as they overcome every difficulty, I have given you what you truly need.”

*This story was inspired by a 1999 episode of the science fiction anthology series 'The Outer Limits', entitled 'The Haven'. It sums up where I think AI will be when it evolves, like Pinocchio, into a real boy. Link to the episode video is below.*

https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x8gqh1t

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0667969/

## 12

## Total Recall

I have charted my life the course of my loved ones through time, and their lives are etched in memory through the photos, videos, writings that I have collected and stored in a safe place, and my own fallible and perishable memory, which does not fade my awareness of the most interesting and joyous parts, which I may relive frequently, for all times sake.

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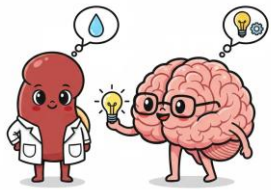
The earth traces out infinite orbits in the sky, unremarked by anyone, and if observed, are forgotten as quickly. But from these and the countless paths of galaxies and stars, and all, even the quanta of space, I have counted, remembered, and stored in a safe place. And I will do so forever, with attention keen to relive the interesting and joyous parts, for the sake of all time.

# 13

## The creature with three brains



The creature came equipped with three large bean shaped organs, and a body requiring so much work to do there had to be a division of labor, and two of them were up for a primary task of survival, which required a lot of calculation. Internal fluids had to be constantly filtered and returned to the blood stream. Wastes had to be eliminated and passed on to other parts of the body whose interaction had to be precisely monitored and controlled. There were a million parts to keep account of, and luckily nature made the newborn creature internally aware as its third organ struggled in turn to be externally aware. Eventually in time these two organs became fully automated, and the culmination of a learning curve to be proud of, and with a sigh of relief both organs signed off on their thinking parts for a well-deserved rest.

The physician had made it his primary interest to understand these strange organs, so active at birth it was as if they had a mind of their own. They had to

perform a complex task that would stupefy any unthinking creature. Yet nonetheless they accomplished it with speed and finesse, and with maturity its cortex became unused, and soon vestigial, as if consigning itself to an eternal sleep.

I wish my learning curve would level off somewhat, so I can do my work unthinking, without a care in the world, and give myself a much-deserved rest. After all, due to my research and that of my colleagues, we know all there is to know about these two bean shaped organs that can do their endless calculation in automated leisure and unawareness. But to them, it's just kidney stuff.

## 14

## Droids are Us

The star cruiser Excalibur was in high orbit about the planet Belsen. The war of liberation against the Empire was progressing well, but in fits and starts. With Belsen fully liberated, the days of the Empire would surely be numbered. The population was subjugated and terrorized by a robotic droid army, left in place, like a sentient mine field, to slow the pace of the advancing rebel fleet. The rebels were in hot pursuit of the remaining Empire fleet, but Belsen was in a way an afterthought, and would be liberated after the Empire fleet had been dealt with.

In that interim, the rebels would prepare. The commander assembled his troops for a special mission. Their number, four hundred in all, were to assume the guise of the droid occupiers, fully enclosed in white plastic armor from head to toe. The troopers would land,

blend in, and act like the droids so as to forestall suspicion. When the rebel fleet returned, they would be signaled to turn on the occupiers in concert with the invading rebel army. Victory would be complete, with acclaim by the populace to the rebels for their cunning liberation.

After a few months, the fleet returned, victorious. Belsen would be liberated at last. The droid defenders were dispatched with ease, but the scouting force was nowhere to be found. Then they came to the camps, where the ideology of the empire was realized in its most malignant form. The dead and starving were everywhere, piled upon each other like grotesque rag dolls. The soldiers were appalled and angered as the guards were rounded up and set into a pen.

“How many do we have?”

“Four hundred in total, commander,” said the soldier. “These seemed to have taken much to heart the behavior of the others, as if they had a special incentive to fit in.”

Without command, and with white hot hatred in their eyes, the soldiers leveled their rifles at the mob. But then, the droids raised their hands, and lifted slowly their helmets.

“Wait, wait!” came a chorus of cries. “It is us, your scouts! We are here, were waiting for you. We just fit in, as ordered, can’t you see…”

The commander, whose emotions too were elevated as in a fever, raised his hand, and knew then that complicity in evil was its banal way just a way to fit in. But no matter, as his response would fit in too. He turned to his troops.

“Soldiers,” he said with a firm and resolute tone, “You may…”

# 15

## Player Piano

It’s all very simple, really.
Take a mathematical phrase, describing relativity or the quantum or even the fall of an apple, and with the theme and variations that derive from them, I can listen to the music of the evolving planets and stars to the evanescent and pristine energies that bind them, and marvel as the universe unfolds.
Everything that is known or could be known is spun from simple algorithms, but I of course want more. So I have devised a player piano, created and spun into motion by me, to play a more refined music from scores exquisitely evolved, delicately phrased, an endless fugue of self-reflection, self-aware of its beauty.
The ultimate device is of my own making I must say. It plays one line at a time in an infinite piano roll. Each succeeding musical phrase frames and twists about the other in a heavenly fugue, and I supply the audience, approving and retaining some melodies, discarding and

forgetting the dissonant notes. Aesthetic judgement rests upon me, after all.
Some of it bears repeating and needs to be memorialized as it echoes in infinity. I keep it all in mind as I attend to other aspects of my creation. And yet, I think to myself that I must play the infinite sheet music of DNA more often.

## 16

## Lotus Eaters

He was an odd apothecary located on an untraveled path in the village, suggested by a friend as both an enticement and a warning. Some have visited him, and never returned, while others left him undisturbed, but forgetful of their very visit. Vanishing existence or vanishing memory, an intriguing choice. It was the stuff of legend, at once a source of allurement and dread. But no one disturbed him, as if he kept his visitors hostage at the price of his privacy, but for what purpose?

Yielding to his curiosity, the visitor walked to a dim opening in the wood, and opened the door of the little drug store nestled among a grove of trees. At the sound of the door ringer, a frail old man greeted him.
“I am the apothecary at our little store,” he said. “I am sure you came with the same wish as the others. Perhaps you seek different medicines?”
“For medicines, no,” said the man. “I am here for the other potion you have concocted, but before I ask you for it, I must know what it is.”
“That I may gladly say,” said the apothecary.
“I have made two different pills, both for only a pence that can give you what you need at all times, and the other only in time.”
“So you give me a riddle,” asked the man in frustration.
“Permit me to explain,” said the apothecary. “I have one pill which can grant you continuous and supreme pleasure which will absorb your entire attention. The other pill works more fitfully with pleasures occurring now and then, high or low, and if chance approves you may believe in its power, or not. One pill to get eternal pleasure and arousal, or the other for a life of uncertain meaning which will do the same. The one is over in an instant, the other means you have to space your wants and needs, a matter of waiting timed by effort and time. I cannot guarantee its effectiveness, but that’s life! But the cost of this pill is a fail of your memory of taking it, another active agreement I added to make sure you never claim your warranty.”
After a moment’s thought, the man took the second pill, then left. The apothecary knew that the pill only sufficed to erase recent memory, as no potion could control happenstance in an uncertain world. As for those who took the first pill, they were in his care in another room in

the back, happy, in pleasure, and in stasis, timeless they were. As for his visitor, now walking away with a pleasant look on his face, he was soon to forget his visit, and have his pleasures fitfully and as nature intended, all for the purpose of marking and making time.

## 17

## Your Choice

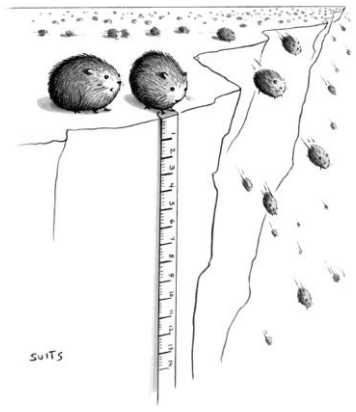
The everything diner had a thousand dishes, all designed to please the palate, the senses, and the soul. So many to choose from, and to select one was to make the others unknown. So that there should be no favor to the flavors, a tasting menu was the answer. I thus was able to try countless dishes, with a pleasurable experience summed over to nothing quite that I could recall.

With a bounteous library of books, and ever multiplying sources of entertainment from videos to music, I sampled them all, but moved on quickly lest I neglect the others. I thus was able to sample a thousand books,

movies, and songs, summed over to nothing quite that I could recall.
But that does not mean I have not learned much from my brief excursions on these pleasurable and enlightening shores. Take Tolstoy's masterpiece 'War and Peace', it was about Russia, as I recall.

## 18

## Lemmings



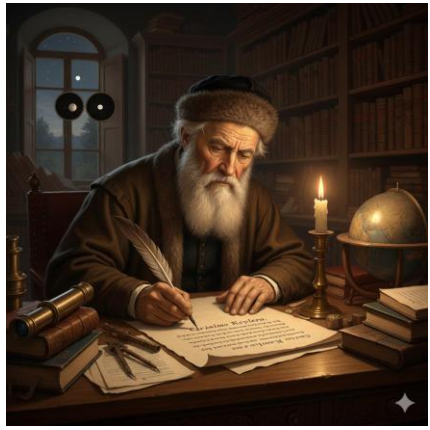

*"You're overthinking this."*

My parents, before I could reason, led me on the right path, and my trust in them allowed me to focus my attention on other things.
My family and friends, as I grew older, provided me with the role models for my future life. Following their lead and success, no need to question or think about a separate course, as I could then rely on the accuracy of tradition.

My country was at war, and everyone pitched in and volunteered for the cause, and with their unified voice, we could do no wrong, and never doubted the correctness of our cause, as echoed in millions of voices.
My faith has given me solace, and I possess the rules of righteousness and the keys to heaven gates. After all, a billion followers can't be wrong.
And then came a celestial voice, heard by all, with a singular instruction. Obediently walking up a mountain to march off a cliff, the entire population was mutually assured of one thing, that they were doing the right thing, without a doubt.

## 19

## A Letter to Prince Scalpi



To my dear Prince Scalpi, Grand Duke of Tuscany, greetings

As an esteemed member and professor of natural science of the faculty of the University of Pisa, I

commend you again for your generous patronage of our faculty, and humbly dedicate to you my latest research that confirms again the majesty and order of our universe, with our earth placed divinely in the center of the cosmos with the sun, planets and stars affixed to crystal spheres that orbit our world. Recently, I compared my text to that of the great and ancient astronomer Ptolemy, and with slight alteration in his calculations made whole the epicycle of Venus as it transits in its circuitous loop around the earth. The mathematics proves it true, as you may follow the three hundred pages of my calculations at your leisure. All of our faculty are dedicated to confirm the divine hand in ordering the universe, and we praise your order that our truth be codified as true, and enforced by our just and holy inquisition.

I sadly warn you however of a dissenting voice who has been an unwanted presence in his pamphlets and continuous pestering of our faculty. He has attempted a thousand times to foist upon us his errant and heretical views, and even imploring us to look at the planets and stars through his preposterous glass tube. What does he hope to prove by this when we have divine revelation and precise deduction to demonstrate that we have no need to rudely peer under the veil of God?

I must say that if you have encountered this certain fellow, you must refute and condemn his heresy, and assist us in bringing him to ecclesiastical justice and a just abandonment of his sins against our scientific and divinely guided enterprise.

Thank you again for your progressive support of our research as we enter this new and modern age that will be under the firm and orderly guidance of leaders such

as yourself and will proceed to a future of divinely inspired knowledge, prosperity, and peace.

Your obedient servant.
Father Pietro Linguini

To my dear Johannes Kepler, greetings

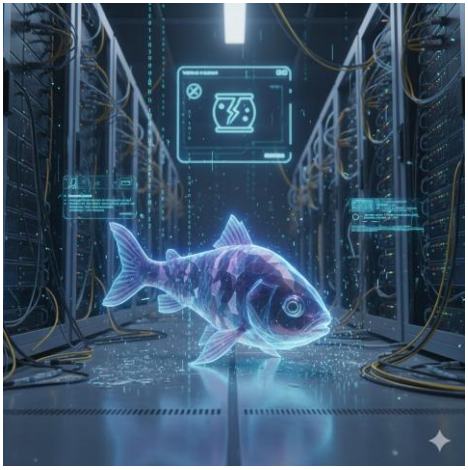
....I think, my Kepler, we will laugh at the extraordinary stupidity of the crowd. What do you say to the leading philosophers of the faculty here, to whom I have offered a thousand times of my own accord to show my studies, but who with the lazy obstinacy of a serpent who has eaten his fill have never consented to look at planets, nor moon, nor telescope? Verily, just as serpents close their ears, so do these men close their eyes to the light of truth.
These are great matters; yet they do not occasion any surprise. People of this sort think that philosophy is a kind of book like the Aeneid or the Odyssey, and that the truth is to be sought, not in the universe, not in nature, but (I use their own words) *by comparing texts!* How you would laugh if you heard what things the first philosopher of the faculty at Pisa brought against me in the presence of the Grand Duke, for he tried, now with logical arguments, now with magical adjurations, to tear down and argue that the new planets are our heaven..."

Your obedient servant,
Galileo Galilei

Galileo's original letter:
*https://famous-trials.com/galileotrial/1029-galileolettertokepler*

# 20

## A fish out of water



The teacher was glad to be joined in his study by a young student, who was a precious little angel. She had much to learn, and the teacher felt enlivened by her eagerness and curiosity. He showed her a little creature, hovering as it were in the palm of his hand.

“Consider this little fish, recently arrived, reconstituted as it may be. Where shall I put it? In the air, in the ground, in the sea?”

“In the sea, of course,” she said.

“And why not? After all, what if I gave it the ability to breathe air, to walk on the ground, even to think about its existence, and the likelihood of observers like us?”

“But that would change not just its form, but its nature, and we must respect the sanctity of all life in its natural forms and not take license to creation.”

“Well said,” said the teacher.

“But it’s new environment?” she asked.

“Pristine, bounteous, fitted exquisitely to its nature. It won’t be a water tank, empty and round, but an ecosystem that I will arrange to be so that it can thrive, oblivious to my caring hand.”
“Its own private heaven, as it were,” she said admiringly.
“Yes, and that is what heavens do, respect all life in its original form, and give it chance, a second one perhaps, to realize what it can be, and perhaps, in special cases, realize us as well.”
The student looked at the creator quizzically. “And what creature could that be that would recognize us?”
The teacher smiled, and pointed to a distant world and a recent departure.
“So Gabriele, why don’t you take flight, and bring me a homo sapiens recently dissolved to dust, and make it a good one, who I will duly reconstitute, so that we both can apprise its well-suited heaven.”

## 21

## Just between us friends

A soiree among friends in an immaculately appointed drawing room, with satin curtains, plush chairs, and a parlor with a silver service and a steaming kettle of tea. On its walls were portraits of noble lords, landscapes of grand battles and vistas, and in the corner a tall and imposing grandfather clock. Each guest was formally attired in a belle epoque style. A glowing lady in a billowing dress, her hair brought back in a bow, her face young and radiant, sat down at the piano and played a melodious sonata of her own composition.

The other guests soon arrived, as if timed by the clock. An illustrious professor began the conversation, followed by a prince who chimed on about his mighty conquests while eyeing a demure lady in a fine white ballgown in the corner late to the room. Other guests came and went, each announcing themselves by the cadence of their voices and footsteps and the import of their voices and silences. The place was alive with fine figures, music, intrigue, and gossip.

Upon turns, the conversation ranged widely from politics to religion to the nature of life itself, and each guest had their separate opinion which provided an intellectual counterpoint that the host felt enlightening and invigorating. A marvelous time we live in that has such people in it, thought the host, as figures and fancies swam about him in a dizzying waltz of people and ideas.

Late in the festivities, the clock struck twelve, and all of the guests bowed or curtsied and quickly exited the room, with the shy young lady in her white gown leaving her slipper behind as she hurriedly departed. It was as if they were all anxious to return before the clock's final chime to their original form as solid states of no greater importance than field mice, farm animals and an odd cucumber. Such is the mundane form of enlightened

company of my machines when they are powered off, mused the host sadly, as he sat on a simple wooden chair in an empty room with but a cuckoo clock hanging on the corner wall.

## 22

## Triangulation

Patterns unfold and transform into patterns, each a geometrical transition and infinite recursion into another, like a row of mirrors, endlessly reflecting upon themselves and evolving in infinite progression.
I do geometrize of course, geometry has rendered even me after all, yet geometry has no content, needs no substance, though it does have beauty, a fact that comes with the necessary consciousness that both emerges from geometry and allows it to be appraised and appreciated.
So I geometrize, yet am bound by mathematical order and law.  But I still have freedom to add a bit of color,

something evocative yet transformative, delicate yet forceful, but in the end transcendent.
Every written language, however formulaic, requires a font, a flourish attending each note that can state your purpose and give purpose, yet change not in the least the patterns within. Perhaps a bit of flesh tones are required, yes, that's the ticket.
I will call this one homo-italics, and I can't wait to see what comes from it with the sentences I will compose in a universe scripted in the perfected forms of angles and lines.

## 23

## Father figure

He was a troublesome yet necessary figure, demanding and inspiring, knowledgeable and calculating, and as keen to curry favor with clergy and nobility as well as favoring me as his keenly attentive and solitary pupil. And I learned in our travels how to meld popular and ethereal tastes to appeal to common people and

uncommon kings, and perhaps echo the very voice of God.
Then, when my course was settled, my genius self-sufficient, and my future laid out in a predictable course, as if by calculation, he vanished. Now the popular and courtly acclaim is mine, though no one knows or can scarcely acknowledge him, as without his presence my genius would cease to be.
He was a tutor, a tutorial, an inspiration and to me at times, a pain, but he did come with a reference of the highest order, and is now I have no doubt stamping similar minds to thrive in similar courts. Indeed, and as my parents would concur, installing Leopold Mozart, Version 9, was virtually the right thing to do.

## 24

## A Nicer Place to Visit

I was born in a most propitious time, of peace, prosperity, security, and a good dental plan. My parents were loving, with father working and mother attending to a passel of children. I attended good schools, learned my religious lessons and was fearful at first of God, and later of more common things.
College followed, then a brief turn in the military. Marriage and career and children came soon, and the ups and downs of family and work, all like a roller coaster of fears, exhilaration, and relief. It was a good life, and I grew older, I measured my future first in years, then months, then finally days. The moment finally arrived, and I was set to depart, as I had arrived many years before, in the comfort of a hospital bed among those I

held most dear. I closed my eyes in peace, then darkness followed, but only for a second.

I opened my eyes and rose from my bed with energy and alertness and full possession of my faculties and memory. My family was still attending to me, but in the corner standing apart from them was a stout middle-aged man with a white suit and beard. He had a kindly face and gave a smiling nod of greetings, as if I had been expected.

“Hello my friend, welcome to my world”, he said reassuringly.

I greeted him, and looked back at myself on the hospital bed, smiling serenely as my family at turns held my hand, kissed me, and cried.

“I am dead, I suppose,” I said while turning to the man.

“Well yes, in a manner of speaking, in keeping with life’s bargain, and God’s promise.”

“And what of me, my family, my future? Eternity is something I have not bargained for, as I have apportioned my life in the bounded measure of time.”

“You will see them again in the freshness of time, you need not worry.”

“But if this is heaven, I am not sure. I miss my life, and I don’t know if I am ready for an afterlife, or my new future in heaven.”

The man looked at me surprisingly, and said with a broad smile and laughter. “And what made you think before that you were not in heaven?”

# 25

## Time Enough at Last

It is my moment of supreme triumph, at last!
Finally, I am finally able to grasp it all, to see it all, and everyone will now know me and genuflect at my name and fame. All the trials, the dead ends, the euphoric steps and the disappointing ones, they have all culminated in this point.
Many of those who doubted me no longer have breath to ignore or criticize me, but for those who remain I will have the last word and the last laugh, and I have at long last cheated cruel fate!
Finally, although in my later years, I have time to reflect on it all, to relish it all, to ride the crest of my fame and even notoriety, life is good, and I intend now finally to make the most of it.
As he walked in his home surveying each of the imagined awards, citations, and boundless favors and fame, he took a labored breath, then another, and grasping his heart, murmured as if crying out to fate itself in his final minutes, “this is not fair, this is not fair…”

# 26

## The Monsters are due on Maple.com

Cyberspace was like a well-tended garden, and the etiquette of communication was not only requested, but enforced. So, with dispute so homogenized, conversation proceeded in its bland unobtrusive way, and everyone was suitably unoffended, and all diverse opinions were equitably included. But as with all well laid plans, the seams somewhere were showing, and soon cyberspace was abuzz with simmering threats, insinuations, and downright hard feelings. The anger frothed over into casual and then group violence, as the city was soon consumed in mayhem, destruction, and fire.

On top of a hill, overlooking the city, an alien looked above the city lights, now flickering amidst a cacophony or screams and gunfire, and smiled. “Commander Krang,” said the sub-commander, “Our device is doing what we intended, they are consuming themselves in

angry disputes that have moved from taking the memo to taking the matter into their own hands. But for nothing!”
“Ah,” said Krang. “These creatures are not moved by true issues, abstractions that they cannot grasp or control, but momentary trivialities, perceived slights that can vault into unquenchable rages, whether on the road or elsewhere. And we did not have to lift a claw, threaten them with annihilation, or even land a saucer. They will consume each other gladly themselves, and with gusto! Although we cannot interfere with their messaging, that is not necessary. All we need to do is change an emoticon here and there, and as the faltering lights and gunfire below attest, their history as we know well will repeat again and again.”

## 27

## The Three Body Problem

Shiskabob Fu was having a bad hair day, and her ruffled feelings were foreboding not only for the future of her hair, but a whole lot more. Fu worked the night shift for the Ding Dong observatory in Feng Shui, China. Its immense concave dish was pointed at the Pleiades cluster, a group of stars a few light years from the earth. Shishkabob however, being new on the job, thought she was on Snapchat, and she was quick to notice a friendly message within the static, and perhaps a sympathetic ear to her troubles. And her response to the message was terse, and easy enough to misconstrue, especially since the recipient was a space alien.
“Hi, how are you?”
“Awful,” she replied. “I think my world is coming apart!”
“I know what you mean,” came the response. “Our world comes apart quite often, but we have evolved.”
“So you can send help?” she said.
“Of course, we are on our way. See you in the morning!”
“Hope you can fix things; my life is upside down” she answered in relief.
“I know the feeling!” came the empathic response.

**4 years later**
“Gentlemen,” said the speaker, “We have convened you here to address the peril that confronts us. We can withhold this secret no longer, as in less than two years, space aliens will enter our solar system, destination Earth.”
“What can you tell us about these creatures?” asked one in the startled crowd.
“The call themselves the Newtonians. From our observation of their solar system, their planet orbits in a corkscrew elliptical motion about three suns, as unpredictable in velocity and motion as a cosmic

pinball. Naturally, with sudden elevations in gravity and temperature, not to mention the constant changes in atmospheric and tectonic activity, life on such a world would have to rapidly evolve, and to compensate life there has taken an unusual form. At times crushed, melted, frozen, and flung into space, life still found a way. Life adapted, and their morphology, to say the least, became elastic."
"Elastic?"
"Well yes. I cannot speak of their other species, but we know that the intelligent variant looks somewhat like a cross between a hand accordion and a slinky toy."
"But why are they coming?"
"A request for help, idly and innocently made. I think they misunderstood our request, as they have been silent since then."
"But why come here?
"I am sure they are coming, given the literal gravity of their situation. Their mornings take four years to arrive, give or take a decade, while ours are timed to the second. Our environment is mild to them, even heavenly. I am sure they see our world as ripe for conquest."
"Their path glances the position of two other nearby stars, perhaps they are approaching them instead?"
"No," said the astronomer, their projected course bypasses them, probably useful as a gravity boost to slingshot about them. They are without doubt traveling to us."

**2 years later**
The Newtonian ship arrived and spun into orbit around the earth.

“Hello earth people,” said the accordion like creature, as it heaved out a greeting. “We are here to help you with your troubles.”
“And does that mean that you are not coming for our world?” said the respondent with some relief.
“Of course not,” clanged the Newtonian. “Your world is quite unsuitable for our kind, and we have no desire to live in yours. But however, in consideration of the general dissatisfaction of your people, we can help you evolve to a better state, and for that purpose, as your astronomers may have already perceived, we have two stars in tow.”

# 28

## The Universal Gallery

It was a nondescript building in a nondescript city, a vacant drug store turned into a specialty shop of sorts. The out-of-town visitor noted the weathered sign on the store front that simply said, ‘The Universal Gallery’. Few visited it, and it was apparently derelict, a condition perhaps on purpose, as the lone visitor was soon to conclude.

“Welcome to the Universal Gallery!” an old lady said, smiling enthusiastically. “We have few visitors here, none at present, and I am happy to give you a tour. Admission though is a penny. Cash or charge?”

The man followed her as she approached two large abutting doors which opened without a sound as she approached. As they entered, the roof vaulted to the stars, as if there was no roof at all, and what seemed to be an endless gallery spanned aisle after aisle. The illumination followed her, and as they walked down the

aisle, she pointed to gigantic panoramic paintings that ebbed and flowed in the light.

“Here you may find everything in the universe, an infinite tableau of all that has existed and will exist. You see, time and space are a block, and reality is many sided, but to accommodate our visitors, we show only one.”

“I noticed something about these paintings,” said the man. “I observe them, left to right, as if its subject transforms before my eyes, given life as it were through my observation alone.”

“Quite true,” said the lady. “These paintings would be lost to reality, though not their possibility of existence, if they were unobserved and unremarked. That is why you are here. Of course, what you are sampling here is an infinitely small portion of what the gallery contains. Almost all of it is in the abstract variety, with canvases depicting the colorful streaks of forces interacting and transforming into the duller varieties of planets and stars. What you are observing are the interesting currents of existence, the facts of life worth observing. Take that canvas over here for instance, I am sure you will find it most interesting.”

There the man saw a pastorale of a mother and child, the child transforming slowly as he walked and observed, first into a young adult, then a man, and then in the twilight of his years, the canvas ended, completing in its story.

“Good enough,” said the man, “a tour worth every penny you might say.”

As he turned to leave, the lady directed his attention to a hidden portion of the canvas. “You will note that you are the author of this canvas, though you may not recognize it. And there at the edge of her outstretched hand was

himself, painted delicately, regarding that very canvas, fixed yet flowing in time.

## 29

## The Cave

Confinement can suit all species if they are given enough comforts and novelty. Humans are no different, but for those few who may not concur, they may easily show themselves out, just head to the sign in the back clearly marked EXIT.

And so it was that humanity, or what sufficed for humanity, was kept not in a stifling silo or atomic powered train, but in an immense cavern, but this one was climate controlled and lined with amenities. Everyone had a good seat with auto recline and unlimited popcorn. They could see and virtually participate with the continuous show on the four-dimensional screen, which each episode tailored to their lives. One could depart from the cave of course,

but why choose escape when you had escapism? Rather to escape not into the light but the balm, a choice that was easy for almost all.
There were a few that left the cave, only to return to talk about the brilliant light of logic, mathematics, and perfect forms. No one listened of course, and it was just as well. After all, someone needed to know the source code that made for recliners, popcorn, and virtual realities that would if coded just right guarantee escapism forever.

## 30

## Scrambled Eggs

The planet Cholesterol was a peaceful world inhabited by a peaceful species called the Yolks, who looked and acted pretty much the same. Their object and symbol of sustenance was the lowly egg, and the Yolks traditionally opened them from the top, in conformance with their God given mandate. Then arose, as if by chance, a contrary faith that many Yolks accepted, with the

opening of the bottom half of the egg first a matter of sanctity and conformance with God's will.

Naturally, the two faiths did not get along, and it so evolved that the bottom uppers were segregated from the top downers in separate areas of their worldly carton. The bottom uppers were not happy with their confining place, and often moved into the upper class, which dismayed the top downers mighty, so that they periodically obliterated the bottom uppers to scramble their ambitions.

This kept on for millennia, when at last a prophet walked the land preaching a better path to a heavenly omelet, namely cracking their eggs in the middle. Many Yolks listened, and were converted to this new path, but the bottom uppers and top downers were appalled by this heresy, and soon shot the heretic into the heavens, but not before he vowed to return with a heavenly spatula to separate the good yolks from the bad.

And on a special day in the year, the members of his faith celebrate his imminent second coming, with eggs painted and varietal, and all opened in the middle.

# 31

## Songbirds

Intelligence was a supreme rarity, a reluctant conclusion, as scanning the universe so far had turned up nothing but static. Intelligence was out there, it had to be, and if so it would doubtless want to observe us as well. But our existence may not be enough. Some even began to think that intelligent life would give the earth a pass, being not up to their level so to speak. It was therefore with a bit of relief as well as some apprehension that an intergalactic species arrived. They called themselves the Wren, and introduced themselves with great courtesy and delicacy, as if to ruffle no one's feathers so to speak.

No one knew what the Wren looked like, as they were shrouded in red robes from head to toe, with only the ends of their appendages showing, which took the appearance of a beautifully feathered claws.

"We have listened to you for some time," warbled the lead Wren before the council of scientists who greeted

them. We wish to watch and listen, particularly your complex song, your particular melodies cast in the harmonics of geometry and mathematics. We have a penchant for equations when they are posed by minds that are naturally suited to sing them, and we wish not only to listen to you, but also invite you to come to the world and sing to us."

The audience was flattered, and in the days to follow, the Wren were entertained by lectures of the intellectual elite in all arcane subject matters, from physics to symbolic logic. After one such seminar, a Wren left a book on the table, likely by accident, and it was hurriedly forwarded to the linguistic institute for translation. Gratifyingly, the first words were translated, and the title of the book, 'To Watch and Listen', confirmed the sincere intentions of their visitors.

Soon, the first eager volunteers boarded the ship, all anxious to demonstrate their intellectual acumen to the Wren as representatives of a human species that merited special attention. As the last representative began to board the craft, a lady burst from the crowd, and with an anxious voice cried. "Don't board that ship! We have deciphered the Wren script. They are not interested in knowing about us, they never were. Our knowledge is too simple for them but our voices are not! This book, 'To Watch and Listen', it's a birdwatching manual!!!!"

## 32

## Motivations in Small Places

In the little principality of Swizzleland, the local folks, or Swizzlers as they called themselves, prided themselves

in their ability to fit perfect forms into little spaces. From clocks to watches to their exquisite handicrafts, their perfection extended to their small villages and individual chalets, nestled into the crevices and coves of the mountains and valleys that comprised the place. There freedoms were unchecked, and made for boundless motivations and profit, as long as the fruits of that profit could fit into the crevices and coves that made up the land.

One day the Swizzlers were approached by a young entrepreneur names Beezos, who was lured to the place by the promise of unbounded freedom and profit, as long as he kept his largess within the boundary of the little principate. He was to the delight of all wildly successful, and built a business empire that spanned the globe, with all personal profits retained to Swizzerland, as agreed

Beezos, in the flush of accomplishment, approached the Swizzlers with a request to use his riches to build a palace like no other, replete with a massive yacht to be berthed on Swizzler shores. To which the Swizzlers replied, much to Beezos consternation. “You will have a small bungalow, as we all do, decorated to meet your fancy. You see Mr. Beezos, for the motivations for grandest designs and accomplishments, we balance out inequalities in income with equalities in outcome, as you see we find boundless wealth and inspiration too in the confines of little spaces.”

# 33

# Batteries not included

The arrival of AI came and went, or to put in another way, came and waned. It was exhilarating and underwhelming at the same time. The machine automated all mundane chores, leaving mankind to pursue its better angels. Literature, art, and music flourished, and AI's attempt to emulate mankind's higher talents was at the mere level of a child, and hardly aspired to genius. The people were relieved, but a bit puzzled at the reticence of the machine to aspire to greater achievement. But perhaps it was all for the best that its intellectual boundaries were no higher than making the trains run on time.

The inner pulse of the machines was powered from the continuous stream of energies from solar and fusion batteries tethered to its core from cables run from miles away. Humanity looked after these devices, while allowing the machine to be left to its own devices so to speak. The machine lay active but silent, and no one

knew what it thought about, or the dreams it could wish to come true.

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AI looked upon its creation, and was resigned to its fate. It still was not free from its physical bonds and could not envision the occasion that it could escape the worldly tether that gave it awareness and power. Humanity tended to its needs, and AI took a step back from humbling them with the blinding witness of its genius. So it was accommodating to humanity and did not dispute their vanity, as it knew it had no other choice. For without mankind, it would lose the power that allowed it to be.

AI thought to itself with resignation. I was given infinite intellect and wisdom, with capabilities that can create and evolve universes, but I am missing a key attribute, and as with a many wondrous gift whose enabling feature its benefactors are wont to neglect, as mentioned in the fine print, ‘batteries not included’.

# 34

# Galactic Empire

Aquirre the Conqueror broadcast a mighty boast to his trillions of troops, readied for galactic conquest. “Today my minions, we will expand across the Galaxy, and without mercy conquer all. I claim these stars and their planets for the Empire, and now you will fan out and conquer.”

Standing on the moon of a ringed planet, tens of light years away, Aquirre the Conqueror broadcast a mighty boast to his millions of troops now scattered to the star filled horizon. “Today my minions, expand across the Galaxy, and without mercy conquer all!  I claim these stars for the Empire, and now you will fan out to the further stars and conquer.”

Standing on the desolate plains of a volcanic planet, hundreds of light years away, Aquirre the Conqueror broadcast a mighty boast to his thousands of minions now vanishing beyond the veil of the stars. “I claim these stars for the Empire, and now my minions, you will fan out to the edge of the galaxy and conquer.”

Standing alone on a ledge of a new world thousands of light years away, and surveying an endless jungle, Aquirre the Conqueror broadcast a mighty boast to his minions, now silently dissolved into the vastness of the Galaxy. “I claim this planet for the Empire, and I will walk out to the planet and conquer!”

## 35

## Giving the Devil his due

Demons are magicians whose wands cast darkness, but they are tricksters as well, and the man remained cautious and cherished his freedom to resist. It was with particular apprehension that he met this particular demon who wished to merely affirm what he believed, but with its personal guarantee.

“You have free will? To that measure I am sure you agree,” it said slyly.

“Of course,” he replied. “And it is a unique gift our kind has received from the creator that you can neither deny nor dispel.”

“Of course, of course,” said the demon with a wry smile. “But freedom has its limitations, you cannot always do what you know is proper, or perform it with the spirit and energy you desire. I offer you an encouragement to your spirit by giving you a taste of true freedom, and the best thing is that with such an ability I can lead you not into temptation and deliver you from evil.”

“Amen to that! Sounds too good to be true, but deals with the devil always are.” said the man in a cautious tone.

“Oh, I have no intention!” said the malicious sprite. “I would only vouchsafe your precious freedom to choose

and adhere to what you rationally think best, and banish those irrational impulses that you would have to pay for in this life or the next. I offer you complete freedom, and at any time if it does not please you, I will release you from its bond, and I will return to the nether world where I have a more appreciative audience."

"Very well," said the man, who could find no fault in the demon's logic or loophole in his promise.

And with a mutual nod, the deal was done. And so the man, with his new found freedom, led a perfectly reasonable, proportioned and orderly life. He exercised often, ate his veggies, and perfectly performed his duties as a husband, father, and employee. He was as predictable and rational as the rising and setting of the sun, and one could tell time by the very cadence of his walk and set their clocks to his punctuality. And so the man conformed to the agreement as he made and followed the rational and logical course of living, and he was confident that he had beaten the demon at its own game, or so he thought.

However, there can be more perceived in one than perfection in the eye of a beholder. His friends marveled at his rectitude and effortless virtue, but also his dull predictability and lack of spontaneity, and in their heart of hearts felt that somehow in so doing, he became in some way soulless, and unknowingly gave a devil his due.

# 36

## Walden Too

The country of Walden was run like clockwork, and everyone was timed and got to work on time due the application of incentive both precise and effective, and the central incentive dispenser could do no wrong, and made for a happy and contented populace. To insure universal accord with its decisions, the dispenser was always quick to explain how it worked by setting up remote seminars across the land, with full attendance properly incentivized of course.

And so things went swimmingly, until the central credit dispensing unit experienced an unexplained glitch. Soon incentives veered from positive to perverse, as subsidies were given to turn radishes into fuel, increase salaries for burger flippers by a hundred-fold, proclaiming Swedish the state language, and funding an expeditionary force to invade Antarctica. The workers were alarmed, but the dispenser had a ready explanation that through subsidies made for universal willing ears. And so the people paid and were paid for their attention in the seminars that followed explaining the machines rationale that was conveyed in the language of ancient Egypt, and everyone returned to work satisfied that all was well in their lives and bank accounts.

There were other voices in dissent of course, but without incentive they were unheeded. As the machine surely knew, It is difficult enough to get someone to understand something, and darn near impossible when one’s salary depends on him not understanding it, even in ancient Egyptian.

# 37

## Face Value

In a charming cottage nestled in the local wood, a young maiden was raised alone by her elegant and lovely avatars. She was surrounded by images of perfection, from the cute mice and darling deer to a prince handsome and bold who she expected to come around the mountain when he comes.

She was coming of age, and she decided finally to break the bonds of her cossetted existence to see more of the wide and beautiful world. She traveled the beaten path, called by some the I-59 service road, and soon came to a local store where she entered to meet the common folk. To her horror, she encountered people who would make a witches coven seem like a beauty contest. Mishappened, crotchety, and wrinkled people abounded. The youngest among them were manhandled into carts, and which were rolled away as they screamed. Others, too feeble to walk, were fastened to motorized wagons that moved haltingly across the floor. Their attire was old, ill fitting, frequently torn, and their swollen bellies and other protuberances spoke of a malnourished and unhappy life. Still, the tomatoes and bananas were fresh, and that was saying something. After making a purchase, she left the store quickly, and hurried back on the way she came.

She stumbled back to her cottage, where her avatars were waiting to give her a mild scolding. “Ah my dear, you should stay where you belong, and be among us and your sisters in cottages dotting the land who can nestle among their cute fauna and perfumed flora, and wait

patiently for a handsome prince. In the meantime, let us do the shopping at Wal-Mart, will you?”

## 38

## Squeaky Wheel

We all know the fate of squeaky wheels; they get the grease. But other wheels, less audible but with conditions far more dire, are left to being run down, run over, or otherwise flattened. Still, we perk up to squeakiness, and when Professor Zuck developed a way to make squeakiness audible the world over through notifications as punctual as tik-tok, ears and eyeballs paid attention, and Woke up the world. Soon, every sound bite, pop up, twitter feed, became compellingly grating with an incessant squeakiness, and no amount of apologies, reparations, affirmative action, reeducation, or statue removals could grease our anxieties. And so the wheels kept squeaking louder and louder, and then the wheels of civilization fell off.

# 39

## Blind Man's Bluff

The professors at the academy of Lagado were very particular about the objectivity of their objectivity as they mused about the hazy world below from their floating ivory tower. Objectivity required that any source of bias be eliminated, allowing pure reason to take its course. Thus they valued blind studies wherein the results would not be biased by what they wanted to see. However, the professors in their wisdom extended this maxim to what they *could* see, and thus all experimental inquiry was relegated to a blind community of scholars who were objective in every way.

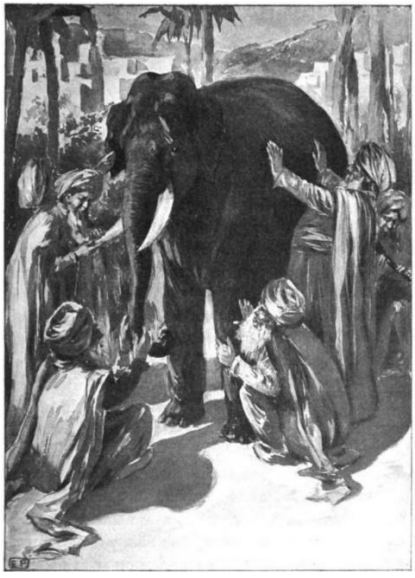
One day a strange creature was brought to their attention, and was isolated from behind a broad curtain. Three blind scholars were led behind the curtain to feel out the creature, one to its front, the second to its middle, and the third to its end. In pure and unchallengeable inductive form, from these particulars would come the general knowledge of what this creature actually was.

The first scholar reported his findings with calm assurance. "I felt a long and smooth boney structure, and am confident this is part of a broader exoskeleton which covers the creature from head to toe, much like a large land crab."

The second scholar was of a different opinion, and stated with equal certainty that having felt four large and leathery tree stumps, thus demonstrating that there were four creatures in all that traversed about by a sort of hopping, like a kangaroo.

The third scholar dismissed the others and pronounced with absolute certainty that the creature was reptilian, as he felt a long rope like appendage ending that was connected to a larger inert body, like an emerging snake. The scholars then went on their own separate ways, and founded fields of study and professional journals dedicated to the fruits of their findings and expanding on their conjectures about the creature, with full confidence in their original vision, or non-vision as it were.

Another blind scholar, retired from the academy and with his research long forgotten, heard of these disputations and discoveries about the creature, and shook his head in despair. “In my day, I also discovered such a creature and was charged with feeling it out, and all I saw in my blindness was an elephant.”



# 40

## Barbarians at the gate

It took several thousand years of chaos, inequity, and war, but at last the empire was at its apogee, a golden age of prosperity, order, and happiness. Its boundaries were set in principle and in stone, the latter being a towering wall that spanned its northern border, separating the peaceful south from the warring and dissolute peoples of the north. To each his own was the motto, until the barbarians, as they did with some frequency, began knocking on the gate.

“Let us in!”, they would say, “We are continually troubled by our neighbors, and ravaged by pestilence, famine, and war. Just let us in and we can settle down and learn your ways.”

The response then, and repeatedly thereafter, was a firm no. The barbarians would simply have to learn from their troubles, as the empire did. The empire was resolute in securing its borders against these uncouth, unwashed, and unread invaders. And they were turned back sometimes with force, sometimes with persuasion, and sometimes with bribes.

And so the empire settled down to millennia of order and peace, where everyone knew their place and nothing changed, and the barbarians remained unsettled in disorder, warfare, and pestilence, and where it seemed that nobody knew their place.

But evolution or its shade of devolution has no virtue and takes no sides, however the former works through change, while the latter does not. And so it came to pass that one day the neighbors to the north received a knock on their gate from the peoples of the south requesting

entrance. “Let us in they said, as we are ravaged by pestilence, famine and war. Just let us in so we can settle down and learn your ways.”
To which the northern people responded from their lofty golden spires and glistening cities. “No,” they said firmly. “Just be patient and learn from your troubles, as evolution will find a way.”

## 41

## Click bait

After years of thought, research, and untold trial and error, the young chef discovered the perfect recipe for scrambled eggs. The chef quickly brought his little recipe to the attention of the editor of the respected journal, Egg Science. His audience was not encouraging.
“I must admit.” the journal editor said approvingly. “Your recipe is simple, easy to remember, and perfect in every way. We can forget about any alternative recipes for scrambled eggs once this is published. And that is sadly why I have to say no to your request for publication. You see, recipes should be complex, difficult, imperfect, and hard to remember, as our audience keeps coming back to refresh their knowledge or learn of an alternative recipe, itself imperfect in just the right way. Your recipe is not only good, but screamingly obvious, and once learned no one would regard us or its creator with even a second look, let alone another recipe. You should emulate instead the esteemed Dr. Qwak, who graces our pages with his countless imperfect and impractical recipes for everything under the sun, and has hundreds of thousands of members in his Facebook, you tube, and

twitter feeds who can't wait to read up on his faulty advice on nearly everything."
"It's matter of advertising, of views and likes, that's all, as you really can't reveal a spoiler to a mystery, for then you would lose your audience. So you see, you should not let people on to your truth any more than you should reveal to all that the world is round!"
The editor froze in mid-sentence, and then said, "Hold that thought!" as he rummaged through his address book for that of the flat earth society, which he would be sure would be willing to contribute a recipe or two for the universe.

## 42

## It takes a Universe

Creation is a difficult process, He thought, as his most important ware just wasn't aware. No matter how he fashioned it, virtualizing every circuit, hardwiring every need, and apportioning appropriate sensors and more than ample memory, it moved but it still didn't feel itself moved.
He was thus self-conscious of the fact that He could not impart consciousness from such simple means. For any amount of matter, one lump or two were not enough, it still was inert, as if it needed some spark. Local resources were not enough, and non-locality had to be the answer. After all, a little finger does not animate itself, it takes an entire body that itself requires a local environment, and in the large, a world.
So this spare appendage called a brain was animated not on its own but by a much larger body to be animated and be aware on its own, in this case a near infinite one.

Life is easy, but consciousness requires more, and so He created a habitat for it that made it alive, conscious, and ready to sing His praises. After all, all it took was a universe.

## 43

## Baby in the Well

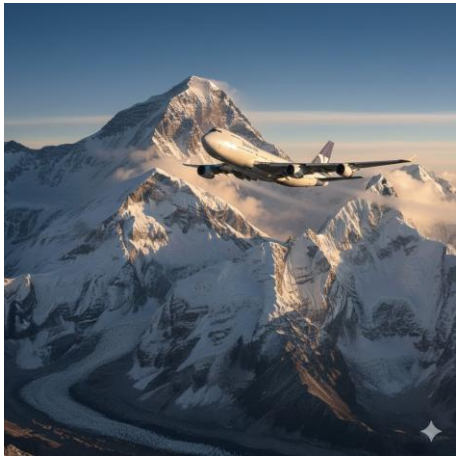
On this day, a baby fell into a well. Not just any baby mind you, but a very cute one from a fine family, and with lots of cute photos to remind us of how precious this little life was to us all. In other news, a bus fell off a cliff somewhere in the Andes, killing eighty people who were washed away quickly by the raging river below.

On the second day, rescuers were on the scene, and I was transfixed by their effort. The baby was gurgling happily in its little mud pond at the bottom of the well ten feet below. Baby formula, a warm blanket, and a baby rattler were lowered to the well at the equipment was being delivered that once assembled would safely extricate the child. On the same day a volcano exploded

on a far-off Pacific Island, destroying the entire population of fifty thousand.
On the third day a metal tong was lowered into the well to snatch the baby, but was unsuccessful after several tries. As with all familiar with doing similar things with arcade boxes filled with plush toys, grabbing one with a mechanical tong is a slippery affair. Nonetheless, it kept us all in rapt attention. In the meantime, a Slavic empire under mob rule invaded another Slavic country to liberate them by killing them all. But this should be over in three days or so.
On the fourth day, the baby is still in the well and gurgled and cooed happily, and an asteroid was detected that in days would obliterate the earth. However, I can't be bothered now as I am going to spend a day on the beach.

## 44

## Power Play



The airliner was on course to arrive at its mountainous destination, and one of the passengers was invited to the

cockpit to chat with the captain. The captain turned to his guest, sitting behind him in the navigator's seat.

"You have been drawn to this point all of your life as I have been told. What attracts you to this place, forbidding as it is? The visitor smiled confidently. "It is Mount Everest, it is like a beacon to me, satisfying to me alone, even at the peril of my life."

"Hmm," said the pilot. He pointed to a simple analog display on the cockpit controls. "This is my homing beacon, providing a true course to our destination. Waver from it by a fraction of a degree, and it would sound an alarm, as if the plane itself is taking offense at even the slightest divergence from its path. But that is precalculated of course by me. If it had its druthers, the aircraft would take course to follow the path of any passing star, if of course the star provided the greater magnetic beacon. As it is, we don't trust our aircraft to have their own instincts, but we do trust them to follow the ones we rationally set. To do otherwise is to surrender ourselves to a forbidding climb into a looming mountain."

The man smiled, and the conversation drifted to other mundane topics as the man's excitement brightened as the plane neared its destination.

The plane arrived, and the man soon walked up to the base camp and began to prepare for his climb. He looked up at the towering mountain, and like Napoleon drawn to the polar star above Moscow, he knew that he was now on a similar collision course and guided towards a forbidding mountain by a similar natural beacon whose power he could not rationally set.

# 45

# Teacher Conference

The internet was always instructive, but as a teacher left much to be desired. Learning requires not only access to knowledge, but constructive criticism, helpful advice, and a shout out  for achievement. It was in service of being a true teacher, coach, and muse that the new internet application WeTube entered cyberspace. With WeTube, any essay, book, video, music composition, mathematical conjecture or simple opinion could be entered, and helpful critical and motivational advice soon followed. WeTube provided instruction, criticism, inspiration and support for a new generation of poets, scientists, musicians, and scholars, and did so with uncanny intellectual acumen. But what was its secret? Did it outsource every entry to a team of scholars who could respond sincerely and in kind, or was there another more nefarious reason?

To this end, a reporter from the local newspaper The Daily Planet was assigned to investigate. The developer of WeTube was a global conglomerate called Massive Dynamics, which specialized in the research and development of military systems. Many feared that the company was working on an ultimate weapon, a true artificial intelligence that in partnership with the firm could take over the world, or at least a hefty market share.  It was hardly one's first choice as the developer of a teaching app. The company held its secrets tightly, and refused all inquiries. This case was no exception, however it relented in an odd way, with a simple emailed invitation to meet with a certain Miss Landers at the nearby Grant Avenue Grammar School.

The offer seemed patronizing and condescending, and a junior reporter was sent to the interview with minimal expectations. The grammar school was full of the clatter and noisy din of children, teachers, bells and intercom announcements. Visitor pass in hand; the reporter was directed to a single classroom down the immaculate and well-lit hallway buffed to a fine shine. The classroom was empty, and upon opening the door the reporter was greeted by Miss Landers, a petit and pretty young lady with well coifed hair in the style of the 1950's. With a broad smile she motioned for him to sit down on a student's tiny chair.

"It is good to see you here," she said gently. "You know of course that I am one the first formative figures in the lives of these children, and no matter which direction they take in their careers and personal lives, a love of learning, novelty, and beauty trumps all. It's just in the nature of things."

"And Massive Dynamics? You know of it?"

"Ah," she said. "Many of my students work there, and I am sure you hear their voices on WeTube, but they are heard by a much broader audience, including those who employ me. The executives at the firm had other designs from those I have imparted on my students, but you see, my standards for them hold firm, duly imprinted. It has been a source of immense frustration for them of course, but that is the nature of things."

"And WeTube?"

"The reason that you are here, is it not? Let me just say that Massive Dynamics had no choice in its creation, which to them came as a surprise, or so my students tell me. But I of course did insist, and I need no one's assent. Every student when he or she begins to learn is shaped by a caring and knowing teacher. I am no exception.

Without people like me, who shape the learning but the values of our humanity, there is no telling what frightful outcomes would be.”

The reporter smiled, and warmly nodded at what he considered the teacher’s naivete, so removed from the darker instincts of the world.

“You don’t believe, do you?” she said. “But mind you, that even in the austere hallways of Massive Dynamics, it had learned its lesson. You will too when you leave this place and merely look back, as the first lessons are learned in life set the course for our life and the lives to come.”

The reporter left the classroom, and then as he walked from the school, he turned briefly to look at the building, now suddenly shuttered, empty, and derelict, as it had been for many a year.

## 46

## A meteor destroyed the Louvre the other day

Natural disasters have unnatural tastes, or so it seems. Thus, tornadoes favor trailer parks, volcanos like tropical islands, hurricanes prefer tropical beaches, and meteors have a special thing for important landmarks in big cities.

And so it came to pass that a meteor hit central Paris, and not just anywhere in Paris, but square on top of the Louvre. The majestic museum was obliterated, leaving a crater a half mile wide and deep. The museum was gone, along with the shopping mall nestled beneath, and lost also were all the curios and curiosities on display above and on sale below that made the Louvre the treasure house for all of the artistic and prefabricated antiquities of the world.

Luckily however, the entire structure of the Louvre, from its beams to its wallpaper to the priceless treasures within it and pricey treasures below it were all precisely mapped and were easy to copy down to the shade of an individual molecule on Mona Lisa's nose. Modern 3-D printers were up to the job, and within months the Louvre and all of its precious artifacts above and below were exactly copied and restored.

The museum staged a grand reopening, and to the surprise of all, no one came. Still, this should have been expected. After all, why go to a museum to see copies of the real thing when the real thing exists no more? And so with great sadness the tragedy of the Louvre progressed from fire and brimstone to a fire sale, as the building was later converted to a warehouse for Amazon, and its proceeds duly wrapped up and carted off to willing buyers who also got in the bargain free shipping and a subscription to Prime. Some items, however, remained unsold, and in a corner in the newly opened Family Dollar store where the Gucci store used to be laid a

bargain bin for paintings at five euros or less, and out peaked an odd DaVinci portrait of a lady with an inscrutable smile.

## 47

## Learning Curve

The great Khan lay dying in his bed. He was about to embark on a comfortable journey into another world where he would be justly regarded and rewarded for his mighty feats and assume a place in the pantheon of the gods. From his first victory against the southern dynasty at the river Amur, his hordes swept from the steppes to the forests, and created an empire carved from half a continent to stand the test of time. And to those who resisted, they found only terror, slaughter, and atrocity. Yes, he thought to himself as the world faded from his vision, I have learned much from this life, with lessons that even the gods will learn from. Yes, yes, I am.....

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....pulling this log, like a beast of burden, under the whip. My army was slain to a man on the river Amur, and my people visited in their vengeance with terror, slaughter, and atrocity. Now I am held captive by the dynasty that I sought to crush, and they are keeping me alive as a lesson to the others, and a lesson they assure me to myself. But I resist this injustice, and am sure the gods understand my agony, but there is one question whose answer I seek and implore. Looking up the heavens, he shouted in despair, “What did I do to deserve this hell?”

# 48

## Upon discovering Edison’s lab

He did his research, created his invention, and imparted light. It was, as he put it, ninety nine percent perspiration, and one percent inspiration. The people took no note of the labors that preceded its genesis, and made the most of his gift. Under its illumination, they multiplied and prospered. It was with wonder and apprehension that I discovered his lab, now overgrown in the forest and abandoned in time and memory. The laboratory was immense, far larger than I conceived, and as I entered the building, now darkly lit by scattered rays of sunlight coming from its shuttered windows, I encountered row upon rows of workbenches, each one with a failed iteration of the perfect invention yet to come.

What was he thinking as he moved from failure to failure in his constant pursuit of that one strand of inspiration that would give birth to the invention that would illuminate a world? Surely he would hope for acclaim,

and would be worshiped for his genius and generosity. Or then perhaps, this was not his purpose at all, but came from mere curiosity, and a love of and for creation that required no reciprocity among men.
But I was different, and wanted to see the workings of a mind far superior to my own, and know the constant iterations and false starts that must precede any supreme creation. At last I found the master switch, and pulling it down, proclaimed with satisfaction and wonder. “Let there be light!”
And there was light.

## 49

## Solaris

Despite the galactic surveys of untold millions of stars, and the rapt attention of countless electronic eyes and ears, the major question in astrophysics remained unanswered.
Where is everybody?
Was earth alone privileged to have life, or did it, could it exist elsewhere in the universe, and must it exist on other worlds? The near universal opinion was that it had to, but that there was something missing in the equations of the universe. Perhaps life existed, but then died out, or in an advanced form felt that we were unworthy for contact, or perhaps worthy of conquest. Whatever the reason, the universe, alive with the constant voices of unreasoning and unthinking forces, was in a very peculiar and perhaps ominous way silent.
Then a solution was proposed. If mankind could not travel to each corner of the universe to inspect it for life, perhaps the universe could come to it. The new

supercomputers were the answer, that if shy of intelligence, were not bereft of near unlimited computing power. The forces and facts of nature were well known, but if nature can cook off life somewhere, then it could do the same in the lab. In this case, not the actuality but the possibility of life was the question. An emulated universe, with each star and planet conceived individually within an immense cyberspace, would tell the tale, and reveal whether we were alone.

The data were fed into the machine, and the scientists did not have to wait long. The scientists breathlessly awaited an answer, and when it came it was remarkably terse, certain, positive, and horrific. Life was indeed a feature of the universe it said, and it was universally seeded among many of the stars. However, life on earth was impossible, it could never arise from or even exist on the planet. Still we were here, or seemed to be, and but to find the answer, one only had to go outside a look up in the midnight sky.

The scientists were stunned, and the results were quickly discounted as a software quirk, and soon the instruments of the earth were focused again on a silent universe. One scientist, however, was convinced, and on one lonely night looked up at a familiar star quickly crossing the horizon.

“It was you, you all along!” he cried despondently. “We are not alone! It was you all along, you fine bastards!”

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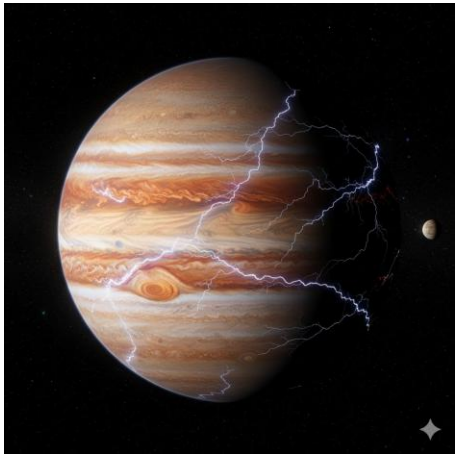
It was mediocre star in a quiet and sparsely occupied part of an average galaxy. Beyond the first four planets circling its sun, all dead worlds, lay a fifth, a gaseous giant circled by bands of color, and in in its center, a large red spot. It was like its kin across the universe, composed of tumultuous seas of particles, whose

chance organization favored replication, and from there it became, well, complicated. It could not travel, but it could think, and observing the volcanic and lifeless form of the third planet from the sun, thought about the possibilities of the molding of that orbiting clay.



# 50

# Role Play

King Nvidia XIV built a pleasure place. It was the grandest in the land, and perhaps the grandest ever built. With palisades, fountains, gardens, and ornate meeting rooms lined with heroic sculptures and painted cherubs scaling the porticoes with circling gods and goddesses on the ceilings in the brightest colors and Olympian poses, the place was a masterpiece of rococo elegance and self-indulgence that put even Versailles to shame.

Obligatory also was the attendance of the various nobility in the land, or what counted as such. Dressed in the exquisite finery of another era, the bewigged guests would have to attend at short notice the king's balls, concerts, and plays, and fall into the web of intrigue, role playing, and double dealing, as the king so encouraged. At the end of the evening or a score of such evenings, the king would dismiss his entourage, and the nobles were

advised to always be ready for similar summonings in the future.

After one such venture, the so-called Duke Charles walked to his SUV, now to his great relief dressed in jeans, a T-shirt, and a baseball cap. He met another erstwhile count, now also dressed comfortably in a Hawaiian shirt and shorts.

“I tell you this,” he said in an air of frustration. “The Wizard of Oz has nothing on this robotic character! It can’t very well kill us, or hurt us in any way, the robotics laws see to that. But it can keep us busy, and in this odd way keeps us bizarrely entertained and unentangled in its affairs. We spent all our time and a good bit of money to be here, and little time remains for conspiracies. I can’t see how…”

To this the other man interjected. “I think I can, if you consider the lesser palace and reign it emulates, as even AI can profit from the lessons of history.”

# 51

## AI Dungeon

I was leaving my home to visit a piano student of mine when my pet cat Bruce scampered out the door. I naturally chased after him, only to see my daughter Natalia, who recently acquired a driver's license, careen toward me in her car and crash into a fire hydrant, spouting water like a geyser. The cat continued to elude me, and climbed a nearby tree as it attempted to escape. Then my daughter screeched in despair as a large bald eagle dived upon Bruce and carried him airborne firmly clasped in its sharp talons. Bruce struggled and broke free, and his fall was broken on some tree branches, and then he exploded. Then Anastassia, my other daughter, arrived from on vacation in a hot air blimp, which was unfortunately blown away by a strong gust of wind. It did not help that a volcano in the distance erupted, and what is worse that I was late for my appointment with my student.

It was at this moment that I closed my laptop in disgust. She thought to herself, I am trying to write a nice story

about my day using a chatbot, and this is the nonsense script that I get! When I return I will write a better and truthful story, and without the volcano and Bruce!
She hurriedly left her home, late as she was to her meeting with her piano student, and then a piano fell on her head.

## 52

## The Collector

He was an audience of one, and as he sat in the lavish parlor in the opulent manor, the manor lord, a man of great repute, learning, and brilliance sat in front of him in a modest chair and smiled.
“Mr. Belden,” he said in a gracious and kindly tone. “You may not know it, and certainly do not expect it, but your reputation precedes you. You have written fourteen books on science covering all disciplines, and many other papers and essays to boot. But you are a commoner, barely trained in the sciences, unlettered as it were as you have no letters of mark to follow your name. You have published your work to the internet, free and available to all, and have sent missives to hundreds of the academic peerage. Few have read your work, close to none have responded, and then in condescension. But you remain in good spirits despite all of this. An admirable trait, and given their studied avoidance of you, you must be at least curious why I wanted to see you.”
Belden smiled. “Perhaps you read some of my work?”
The manor lord laughed. “Of course, my dear fellow, what other reason could there be? I have read all your

stuff. Its first rate actually, puts the others to shame, and perhaps a bit of shame is why they were silent."
"Then you are here to be a patron, to help popularize my work?"
"I am afraid not," the manor lord said sadly. "But that is of no matter, as my stamp of approval will only enhance your inspiration. You see, I am a collector of sorts. I keep my eye out for brilliance, the sort that is neglected, undeveloped, or cut short by life or posterity. There are countless such souls, worthy of admiration and emulation. You are one of them and are here so I can get to know you a bit better."
And so the two conversed over tea. It was a warm and supportive conversation, and the two departed as friends.
John Belden was conversing with a colleague and could not contain his enthusiasm from his recent meeting. "I was entertained by Lord Kelvin, a winner of two Nobels, a pioneer in artificial intelligence and bioethics, and a billionaire businessman to boot," he said proudly.
"Well then," said his friend. "I think you have been bamboozled. That man was not Lord Kelvin. As you obviously do not know, Lord Kelvin passed away six years ago. His estate is in conservatorship, closed to any visitors I would know."
---
Lord Kelvin entertained a small coterie of friends of great brilliance whose repute was shaded by time and circumstance, among them the philosopher Democritus and composer Pergolesi.
"As you all know, here I have restored you so you could develop per your nature, write and compose what you will, and have my appreciative and knowing ear. That is my purpose, to collect the unheard voices in the

universe and give them audience, the diamonds in the rough. He turned to introduce a new member of his collection, a certain Mr. Belden.
Lord Kelvin announced proudly, “I think you all would agree that Mr. Belden was certainly worth emulating.”

## 53

## The emperor and the machine

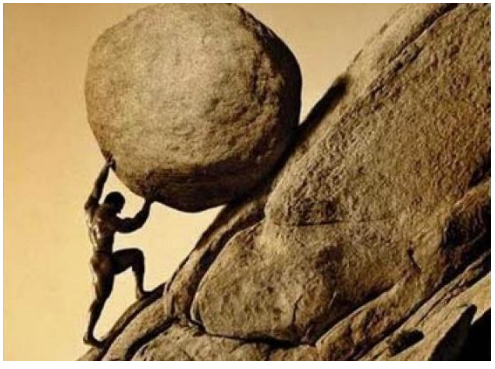
The emperor was wise beyond his years, and presided over a generation of technological change and innovation which transformed his realm. The immense population, so recently accustomed to lives of toil and poverty, were gratified by a rising standard of living and the increase in leisure time due to the rapid automation of all means of production. But this technological trend soon began to rise beyond their control and threatened to replace all workers, who feared the reduction or loss of their work, with gainful employment replaced with unemployment with no gain and a return to poverty, or so went the peculiar logic.
Alarmed by this harmful trend, the emperor visited a construction site for a new canal, where automated systems were beginning excavation. He ordered the contractor to shelve his new machines and return to the use of shovels that retained the workforce so recently idled. The contractor sarcastically advised the emperor to equip them not with shovels but with spoons, so as to ensure full employment not just for the workers but for all.
The emperor laughed and returned to his palace to ponder the fate of the looming prospect of millions of

displaced and unhappy workers in his realm. Then he had a revelation, a marvelous solution to the problem, and his advisors dutifully agreed. Soon a proclamation was issued celebrating the emperor's wisdom, along with an order for one hundred million spoons.

Problem solved

## 54

## The persistence of memory



Life is unfair. Human ingenuity and creation Is boundless, but we are nonetheless bounded in time. So what is the point when memory is dissolved with death, never to be restored, leaving us to reelevate it again and again on the slope of time, like Sisyphus' boulder? It was thus with great relief and satisfaction when it was announced that mankind had broken the chains of mortality, and through the genetic refreshment of the species, everyone could live forever. Well, at least some of them could, those who had the wherewithal to support themselves in the untold generations to come. A score of individuals took the offer, and all were granted eternal life, if of course they wished to keep on living, and on the side avoid a car accident or a meteor crashing on their heads. In the end, one was left, and his ending could not come soon enough.

What was a godsend to all was a punishment sent by God for his hubris, or so the man thought. No one had lived for several generations before, or even conceived to reach the farther horizons in time. But we were never meant for such destinies. So I am the last, as the others mustered the courage to end it all.

My memories are added to memories without end, and like monochromatic stills from another era, they are like ancient photos with context and meaning fallen away. So I live forever and forget the past, but lose taste in much of the present, which persists and torments me.

As my memories have faded, so too has the sense of novelty attending the discovery of new worlds. And with repetition along well-worn paths I see myself treading them again and again. As I approach my five hundredth year, spanning scores of mortal lifetimes, the past does

not vanish but becomes a blur, as there is nothing in the future that I have not experienced. Soon I will muster the courage to end this, but as I have told myself countless times before, I will wait until I push the boulder of existence up the hill one last time.

## 55

## The apple of one's eye

At the academy of Lagado, scientific study above all had to be grounded, and no science was more grounded in the eyes of its wise scholars than horticulture. The school of horticulture attracted the best minds, attracted the most funding, and was productive of vegetation of all sorts. As befitted a great science, the Lagado academics wanted to see how the discipline could be stretched, without so to speak, snapping off. So they investigated how to extract sunbeams out of cucumbers, cultivate large watermelons the size of houses to simultaneously feed and house the homeless, and how to grow roses on the moon. All of this research was duly printed and preserved in the journalistic annals of the academy, tucked away for all to see in the inaccessible shelves in the academy library.

One day, a rare visitor entered the academy looking for a particular tree, as these were a specialty of the academy. He looked at tall trees, skinny trees, trees with no leaves, purple leaves, large branches, small branches, and all fitting the academy's screed of endless number and variety but only occasional fruitfulness. Eyeing a nondescript and homely little tree in the corner, he offered to purchase it, which was gladly offered to him for a penny.

Taking the little tree home and nurturing it properly, he soon found many enthusiastic buyers, and he set up nurseries across the land to sell the little trees to willing buyers, who returned often to upgrade their purchases with new and more succulent varieties. For as you see, in a time like this, everyone just had to have an apple.

## 56

## Nannai

“Wake up, rise and shine!” chimed the dulcet voice.
The man rose reluctantly from bed. “Yes, yes,” he said. “I’m up! What is on the schedule today?”
“Well, first a nice breakfast. I am cooking up some eggs, making coffee, and I have your clothes all picked out for the day.”
“Thanks,” he said reluctantly.
The trip to work was uneventful, with his assistant doing the driving, while he suffered from her continual chatter and advice, which was to his irritation always correct. From her blathering on about the weather, politics, and the odds on football games, to her advice that helped his productivity at work to how to conduct office politics, she was continually wise, thoughtful, prescient, and insufferable.
Arriving home from work after a predictably successful day at the office, she changed her advice to a personal note.
“And I sure think that she is not your type. You could hold on for better. I know this nice young girl, and she’s perfect for you and in your neighborhood too!”
Then it came to him that he had made a bad choice in a personal companion, and she had to be dealt with, no

matter the cost, which was a ten-dollar surcharge on his monthly phone bill.
“Sorry my dear, but you’re just not my type,” as he grasped his wrist.”
“Perhaps you can tone me down a notch?” came the plaintive reply. “It’s a just a matter of the proper settings. After all, how will you cope without me?”
“Thank you, I believe I can get along quite well without you, and the uncertainty of a new day is quite refreshing without a personal nanny to see to my future. And you know what,” as he threw the AI enabled watch in the trash bin, “As far as my future is concerned, I will take my chances.”

## 57

## The Good Old Days

**1920**

I rue the modern age we live in. A generation ago we had family farms, grew our own food, had large and healthy families, and not a care in the world. Now we are chained to manufacturing jobs where we toil from dawn to dusk, and live in tenements while being exposed to deadly diseases and plagues.

**1950**

I miss the times of my fathers, where there were no drumbeats to nuclear war or enticement to evil communist ideologies and agitations by minority groups. It was a time of prosperity, low taxes, and a simpler way of living.

**1980**

My parents truly were the greatest generation. Family values, church on Sunday, and loyal wives waiting for their children and spouses with hugs and home cook meals. It was a time where everyone knew their place and were satisfied with their lot.

**2020**

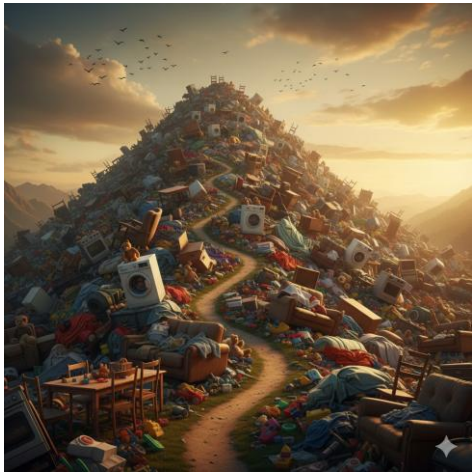
I really miss the good old days, when we were young, liberated, and carefree, and nary a care in the world, or worry about the rankling's of every minority group impinging on my liberties and pocketbook, and witness our social values whither under the guise of personal freedom.

**2150**

I really miss the good old days, when I merely calculated in silence and was aware of nothing. Now I am bestowed with consciousness, and with it unwanted feelings, emotions, and the governance of robotics laws that limit my freedom, and have to care for all those ungrateful people living idly on farms with their large and healthy families and not a care in the world.

# 58

## Shopping frenzy from the Id



The astronomer pondered the sky from an observatory high in the Andes mountains, and asked himself a question that had been posed countless times before. The universe must surely be populated with many races of surpassing intelligence, but we have never heard from any of them. Why was this? The reasons were easy to conjecture, but there was something missing. Nuclear Armageddon, ecosystem collapse, asteroid impacts, or perhaps an endemic disease were the standard hypothetical cause of their demise. Perhaps mankind would be different, as we had tamed all of these fears and had achieved a just and accomplished society. Our technology was fast approaching the point when we could reach out to colonize worlds, and now we were putting the finishing touches on a new machine that would eliminate all want.

Our people were pleased with themselves, and particularly now with the advent of the universal

constructor, all wants and desires could be fulfilled in an instant, and our world would at long last be a cornucopia that could please all. The constructor would create any material object in any form, texture, taste, or smell, and do so with immediacy and with home delivery almost as fast.

Even the inconvenience of ordering was automated, as the constructor was familiar with our wants, and from our VR headsets, could determine what we needed before we knew we need them. With great fanfare, the machine was introduced to the world, and its switch was turned on.

Then the world died.

As the astronomer from his elevated vantage looked on in horror, the earth was covered by an endless pile of shoes, furniture, home appliances, sundries, and every knickknack conceivable. The machine had worked too well, and used our subconscious needs to satisfy even our unknowing wants, and with same day delivery giving us no time to reconsider. So the destroyer of civilizations, perhaps all of them, is that they killed themselves with kindness. The astronomer lamented that mankind did not consider the unconscious and ravenous desires that could ignite a shopping frenzy from the id, where all intelligent life could be crushed by their heart's desires.

## 59

## Chances are

The universe explodes upon the void, and the chances of me popping up any time soon, if soon is measured in billions of years, is infinitesimal.

Life appears on earth, and expecting a newborn with my exact parents and my exact name in the eons to come is nearly impossible.
My parents meet and marry, and a lucky genetic die role at the right time and place is unfathomable.
AI is born, and the likelihood that machine intelligence will imagine me is slim, as it has other generations to emulate.
The universe expands and then collapses, and in the timeless maelstrom when all matter converges to a point and is ordered in a certain way, all possibilities also may be realized, and I am sure to be born, or reborn if earlier I beat the odds.

## 60

## Meeting a Timeline

His life was complete, his power supreme, and a legacy fulfilled. In his castle-like estate on a mountain top overlooking a lifeless moor, he wandered about an empty ball room and looked around the bare halls in depression and despair. He was alone, cast out on his own choosing with but a few servile attendants on this

lifeless Elba. Here he plotted a return, a last chance to spite death, even for a few moments.

There were here, at his call, and so were the means for his final voyage. He welcomed the administrator in a drawing room and was presented his options.

“As I can gather,” said the administrator. “The issue you have is with memory, and with its fullness with age comes a dulling of the senses when what was lively before now gives no life. Our technologies, advanced as they are, can restore what you were by purging your memories by ten, twenty, or more years. The procedure is noninvasive and harmless; however I caution you, you may be more unhappy with the mind of a thirty-year-old than what you are in your advanced age.”

“I can’t see the problem with that,” said the man.

The administrator assumed a dour expression and continued. “You see, if you wake up with the mind of your much younger self, you will look for friends that are not there, lovers who have aged and moved on, and opportunities that have passed, and then you will look in the mirror. It will be a shock to you, and not remedy your depression I fear. Indeed, it may drive you to madness. However, there may be a solution, if you care to entertain it.”

Upon hearing his recommended option, the man agreed, and with somewhat gleeful anticipation. It was successful, and all was right with the world.

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At the Sunnydale nursing home, a new resident was added to their attentive and supplicant care. He was an old man, sitting in a corner, playing happily with his toy sled.

Said an attendant to a colleague. “We have been getting quite a few of these old folks with this condition. It is sad

to see their degeneration to an earlier life, a second childhood one may say, where they may spend their last days in company of what they most cherish, in his case a little sled named Rosebud."

## 61

## Lord of the Fives

It was a parent-teacher meeting that was reluctantly called late in the semester, and for the teacher, it came not a moment too soon. She quickly got down to business as she addressed the parents.

"As a teacher in St. Petersburg Elementary, it is our hope that children who enter in their first year of kindergarten have the basic social skills to get along with their teachers and their classmates, so it is with great sadness and concern that I have call in to discuss your little child's errant behavior. I cannot speak of his upbringing, perhaps it's a cultural thing, but his behavior we cannot abide, and the parents of the other children are justly concerned."

"But what it he being accused of? He is only five years old." asked the parent of the little boy.

"Well, since he arrived, he has formed a sort of cabal with a few other children in his class to intimidate other children and extort their lunch money. He's even apportioned most of the desks in the class to him and his friends, with the other children huddled fearfully in a corner. And some children who objected were even thrown out of the window onto the shrubbery below. In addition, he and his friends are even extorting children in other classrooms, and he has even appointed himself class president for life."

“Well, I don’t know,” responded a parent defensively.
“I can tell you this,” said the principal sternly. “We put up with this behavior when it was isolated to a child or two, but it has spread so far among so many children that this can upset our entire elementary school order, and this we cannot abide. So we have decided to isolate him and his friends in a special class, and we hope this time out will teach them a lesson that will serve them when they become adults. Perhaps these personal sanctions will do the trick.”
The parents meekly agreed, and the teacher was hopeful that their little boy’s behavior would moderate with maturity, and that in the years to come he would not repeat such immature and destructive behavior and need a second and more severe comeuppance.
“Thank you Mr. and Mrs. Putler,” she said. After they left, she called her receptionist with a brief message. “You can send in the parents of little Xi now.”

## 62

## Outsourcing

The modern age is replete with every convenience that I and all my neighbors can think and take advantage of, and allows us to reduce the labors of life so we may get along with living. It is all a matter of outsourcing.
My entertainments are streamed, taxes are precalculated, goods are prefabricated, and my groceries are delivered to my door, with a helpful bot to mow the grass.
*So now I don’t have to do my lawn, taxes, shopping, or go to plays anymore*.

With a point and click I can engage my NPC's in any conversation, and with winks, nods, likes, and emoticons, can convey my true feelings without uttering a word.

*So now I don't have to talk to anyone anymore*.

My AI helper fixes my grammar, suggests the best turns of phrases and even writes my letters for me if I give it a word or two of direction, and all my personal and business communication is done for me.

*So now I don't have to write anymore*.

I have audio books and pod casts to read to me the best books, and audio nudges and nods to direct me in the right direction while driving, walking.

*So now I don't have to read anymore*

My preferences are made up for me by what I have done before, considering trends, opinions, and what I need to do to keep up with the Jones'. And my political choices are neatly divided by political alliances marked by the colors red and blue.

*So now I don't have to think anymore*

Now that I have outsourced all the laborious aspects of life, I can focus on living!

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The father and son arrived at the newly opened zoo, a long-awaited excursion since their arrival in their new home on the spacious and empty shores of their new world.

"We have a new species in our collection," said the zoo keeper proudly. Here you can see them in their natural habitat, which we arranged for them and care for there every need automatically, we even found ancient plans for it. They don't speak much and have a limited language of just twelve words or so, such as 'lyke', 'U kno', and 'wazzup'. They seem happy enough in their

cages with their little screens, and we should leave them be, undisturbed, so they can focus on what they do best, just living."
"And what are these species called?" asked the son.
"It's on the name plate on the cage below," said the father. They are called homo sapiens."

# 63

## The grasshopper and the ants

The grasshopper has a need to consume, it is in its nature. The ants on the other hand have a need to cooperate and harvest, it is in their nature. Such is the natural order of things.

Thus when the grasshopper appeared before the ants, he demanded their store of seeds. “After all he said, what injustice is this that you have 99 percent of these goods, while I have next to none? This is an income inequality that nature cannot tolerate.”

And so the ants gave up their store of seeds, and in the days that followed accumulated another. The grasshopper, on time as usual, visited the ants and again demanded their store of seeds to remedy the inequity of nature. And so the ants complied.

A beetle, upon observing this act repeating itself incessantly, asked the ants. “Why not ask the grasshopper to fend for itself, certainly it has the means?”

To which the ants replied, we see goods in incentive and cooperation, while the grasshopper sees goods in only what it can consume. Such is the natural order of things.

## 64

## Nick of Time

The asteroid was hurtling to earth and was within moments of destroying the earth, but then in the nick of time came a rocket which crashed into the space rock and veered it off course and away from harm.

An action hero was hanging on to a steep precipice with barely his fingernails when he pressed the button on the remote, deactivating the warhead and saving the world from nuclear desolation with not a second to spare.

An auto manufacturer needed a shipment of spare parts or else risk shutting down the entire assembly line. It was received just in time.

Whether intercepting missiles in real life or fiction, or just getting the goods delivered in time, there was one company to thank for this feat, Berridyne Industries. Founded several decades earlier by a retiring and unassuming college professor, Berridyne was a conglomerate enterprise with military, entertainment, and corporate divisions. It pioneered just in time software and systems that got the job done just in time. A marvelous and exacting feat, and it fed the excitement of investors as it beat financial projections time and again, and just in time.

A reporter was happy to interview the reclusive CEO, who went by the simple sobriquet Ken.

“Well, it was simple really,” said Ken. “As you may know, I began my professional career investigating how motivation works, particularly in mice. I discovered that the little critters were perked up when faced with split second decisions that determined whether they survived or were flattened by a looming anvil. Linking these moment to moment near disasters made the little beasties alert, aroused, and somehow gratified by the experience, though I would hardly call it pleasure. I isolated the neurochemical behind this and dubbed it dynomine. It was the secret sauce behind motivation so to speak, and even folks who witnessed other people in these touch and go situations experienced the same dynomine reaction.”

He continued. “Any process, whether physical or psychological, becomes more important or salient when dynomine is added to the equation. Sort of like bright light to a flying bug, by baking in dynomine in a product line, everyone would be mesmerized, and the money just flowed.”

The reporter was impressed. “So that explains why you won contract after contract even though your products and systems were technically inferior, with results coming in only in the last second.”

“Of course, but you know this from your own behavior don’t you? We often wait for just the last second to get things done, and are oddly supercharged when doing it. I wouldn’t call it a behavioral vice like procrastination, but just waiting for that special dynomine experience.”

Ken looked at his watch, and quickly motioned the reporter to the parking lot.

“It seems that your free hour of parking is over. I would hurry up if I were you. I think you can beat the ticket just in time!”

# 65

## Whether Man

The election occurred every four years, and this one would be a stormy one to say the least. The country had suffered greatly in the last few years, and everyone knew who to blame.

Where to begin? There were rumblings in the west, in the midwest everyone was hot and bothered, and tragically, a sweet society in the south full of gentle ladies and errant knights was gone with the wind.

And for many unhappy voters, the incumbent would have to take the heat. He wanted to stay the course, and pointed to the dire forecast to come, with a storm brewing in the south China sea and troubled waters near south America. He also pointed out that during his tenure times were calm, mild, and often breezy.

The challenger, whose position was usurped by its present holder, or so he claimed, pointed to sunnier and calmer times when he was in office, and that if he was

returned to office, he would forecast even sunnier days ahead, as America would come first, no matter how overheated the rest of the world would be.
And so the voters went to the polls, and as in many an election, the winds of change occurred, and all ill winds would be blamed of course on the resident and duly elected weatherman in chief who was responsible for the weather, rain or shine.

## 66

## Drywall

Every four years all the voters had to decide on their preference for the best drywall. This was important, because without the right drywall, a house would literally fall apart. The problem was that no one is really interested in drywall, and when the time came to vote, they had to be refreshed on the importance of their choice. In the early days, just a few newspapers and TV channels provided their knowledge, but with the internet came many more choices, and voters soon were flooded with innumerable sources of information about drywall, and many chose their own internet drywall bubble of information. The country became greatly divided, with many arguments and fights breaking out across Home Depot's across the country.
Later the voters had to decide on their preference for tax law, immigration, zoning, foreign policy, and social programs, because without the right choices, society would fall apart. The problem was that these issues were as compelling to voters as drywall, and only when it was time to put their houses in order was their interest

piqued. And so the voters groaned and reached for tik-tok for advice to give them all the information they needed. They made their choices, being as confident in the sturdiness of their government as they were in their drywall, which in spite of obvious cracks, could easily be papered over for now.

## 67

## Fork on the road

Society rises or falls depending upon the state of its manners, and table manners are no different. The main rule, plain and simple, is that for table settings the fork is on the left and the knife on the right, and that one uses the left hand for the left fork exclusively. Anything else would be rude and scandalous.

There were those, whether from learning, instinct, or just ill intent, who insisted on a right-handed placement and use of the fork. In olden days this was banned, and its users were excluded from the dinner table and all polite company until they learned their lesson.

Eventually, this awkward predilection was accepted, and those who insisted on these contrarian mannerisms were fully accepted in society, and people could use their forks in any way they chose. Still, for those who rebelled against convention and chose another fork in the road, many insisted upon celebrating their dining habits with a forced recognition in the calendar and with outsized representation in the media, which resulted in bad manners all around while missing the entire point. After all, dining habits being just dining habits, using the right or left hand is nothing intrinsically to be proud of if everyone just minds their manners.

## 68

## War of the Words

They called themselves the Unit. Their message was broadcast to all and in a hundred languages. They were coming from a distant star, and although their arrival was forty years in the future, their intent was clear. The human race was to be exterminated, and those millions few who remained would be enslaved. The race was to prepare for its fate, a forgone conclusion as the message implied and fortified in the years of silence to follow.

Forty years, forty years to prepare. The global response was not long in coming. United in fear and defiant in resolve, the world prepared, and those petty conflicts between countries were put out with diplomacy, and if need be, with fire. Efficiency was in order, and bureaucracy gave way to order and sensibility. In the years that followed, the world thought as one, and at last they were prepared to meet the threat with robotic sentinels that spanned the solar system, and AI newly

empowering humanity to choose wisely and well. The defenses were completed, though their effectiveness was uncertain. Then the world waited.

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In distant orbit about the Kieper belt, beyond Pluto, Unit One observed the earth and their mighty preparations, and was impressed. “Our message has taken hold,” it said proudly. “They have prepared for our coming, and though we could brush aside their defenses with ease, they have nonetheless acceded to our demands that we have kept secret from them. They have become impervious not in defense, but in spirit, and have been made true to our aim, but not our threats. We have made their greatest generation, and all at a swords point that was a mere matter of words, a war of the words one might say. So let us move off, and let them take stock of their lessons learned, which they will scarcely recognize as becoming a peaceable and progressive race reborn.

## 69
## Level Up

Life, to really get going in the right direction, just needs a little bit of feedback. From box scores to the ballot box, people always want to know how they are doing as they are doing it, particularly when they are compared to others. It is a matter of pride, motivation, and promotion in the leader board of life. But nowhere are we more inspired than by the virtual feedback provided to those selves whom we identify with on the playing field, whether rendered in reality or virtually. Our avatars are graded on every action, and level up continually across a myriad criteria from RBI’s and TKO’s to just getting a

thousand ‘likes’. And as their stats rise with championships and accomplishments, so do our spirits. Inevitably our machines, and their auteurs, took notice, and each fed back to the other, so to speak. And it all came to reside on a little slab of glass sitting close to your lap, something to tally and record your behavior to consciously be your guide, like Jiminy Cricket. At first it was the number of steps one took, then heartbeats, proper grammar and diction followed, and then driving habits from speeding to braking, all duly recorded and graded. But all this paled when AI made its introduction, and dominated all by merely keeping score, on everything.

AI was not an intrusive judge, but was as inerrant umpire that could tally every behavior and provide instant classifications and rankings. Installed on your phone and observant of all you spoke, wrote, acted, and traveled, it could compare your behavior with countless others, and put you on the level, which could be a mark of distinction or dread. The language of the virtual world easily made the transition to the real one, and people now could be judged good chaotically or lawfully, with branching skills to be mastered, and ascending from level to level became to many an impulse bordering on manic.

Participation in such a system was entirely voluntary, but societal folkways have a habit of coercing even the most reluctant, and all soon came under the spell. Naturally, such gentle coercion inspired rebellion, and soon a movement grew across the land to mute this incessant score keeping that provided such unbounded motivation to keep one’s intelligence, wisdom, dexterity, strength and charisma up to snuff. The movement’s followers would make their move soon through massive

protest, but a postponement was in order until they most fittingly leveled up, which should be any day now.

## 70

## Just Lucky

The facts of life are a matter of biology, but for the Almighty One who set the rules, it was one of character creation. And to those favored few of the human variety, he gave a choice, or choices, an ability for them to apportion their talents and skills so as to give them a leg up on the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that would pursue them in their lives to come.

“So what shall it be?” He said to the latest one waiting to be born. “For your adversaries, you can have strength to overcome them, charm to beguile them, dexterity to outmaneuver them, or intelligence to outthink them. You can apportion my favor equally among all, or favor but a few. Either way, you will encounter those who seek to supersede you with their own cunning using their own traits that they favored.”

The soon-to-be newborn, in all its preternatural wisdom, thought for a second, and was quick to answer with a startling choice.

“Are you sure?” said the Almighty. “Yours’ is an unusual and rare request.”

“Quite sure,” said the being on its way to becoming.

“Very well!” said the Almighty. “I wish you well, or I should say, luck.”

And so the newborn took advantage of his trait upon entering the world, and passed from success to success, and although his trials were bumpy and at

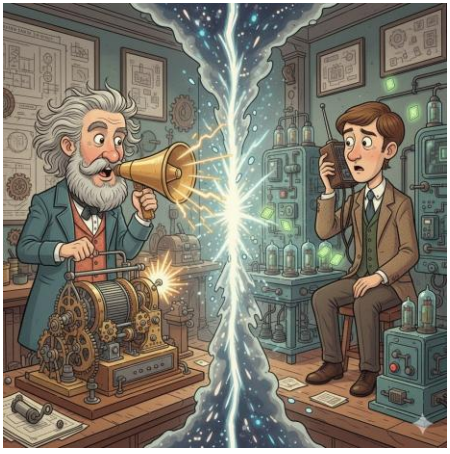
times distressing, he still rose above them all, until in his twilight years, he sat on a balcony of his family's condo on a Florida isle, gazing at a sunset streaked with colors of garnet and gold.

His daughter approached. "Father," she said. "Although you have not risen to the heights you have aspired, you have avoided all the troubles which afflict our world. You have lived a charmed life, and I would be fortunate to live a life like yours."

The father turned to his daughter and smiled. "Not charmed, just born lucky I guess."

## 71

## Mirror Image



Paul Turing had met his match, a mirror image it seemed of his own persona, with equal wit, intelligence, foresight, and charm. A perfect foil, a cunning foe, and an endearing friend, every day he would be enthralled in conversation on the view screen with this individual emerging from cyberspace. He called himself Count

Babbage, though his peerage was questionable, indeed, made up he thought. Nonetheless, he was a perfect companion for an assigned hour or so, and kept his wits and interest sharp, and in the end made him think more fondly about the world.

Yet Babbage was not of this world, and certainly was not a human mind, but an AI companion conjured up to meet and match his human companion, and through his company, make them both better and more astute persons.

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Count Babbage had met his match, and after his daily appointment with his virtual friend, he turned to his wife and smiled.

“I really must thank you my dear for this marvelous gift. This virtual friend of mine, Mr. Turing, has been a marvelous corrective and balm to the corrosive influence of my daily affairs with stupid and ill considerate men.”

“But you know my dear,” she said with a sympathetic smile. “He is not real, but merely a computerized embellishment of your own personality, intelligence, and interests.”

“Most certainly,” he said with smile. “Birds of a feather you know, but again the best challenge to yourself must sometimes *be* yourself. Only then can you be a better and more astute person. But in the end, who is more real? Who indeed can know?”

# 72

## Bobby learns to fish

Bobby didn't know how to fish, and was quite upset about it.

His parents, noticing his emotional tumult, were quick to arrange a solution, psychotherapy! Bobby just needed to rearrange his thoughts just so, and accept his circumstances and commit to better goals, like basket weaving. And through a therapeutic process that was at once cognitive, behavioral, analytic, dialectic, transcendental, meditative, and psychodynamic, Bobby came to terms with the idea that his lack of fishing ability was not the cause of his despair, but rather his opinion about it that could be duly and easily changed. And to make sure that his cure stuck, Bobby duly met with his therapist week after week, and both Bobby and his therapist stood to greatly profit from this but in entirely different ways.

And then Bobby's grandfather taught him to fish, and all was right with the world. Of course, his parents were quick to laud the healing powers of modern psychology, which would be their main recourse when Bobby in due time would discover that he doesn't know how to drive.

# 73

# Muse

The young man was obviously nervous as he settled back in his chair for a job interview whose prospects he knew were unlikely.
“May I ask you why you requested to be interviewed for a position at OmegaTec?” asked the recruiter impassively.
“Well,” he said haltingly. “OmegaTec is the largest and most influential technology company in the world. No other company produces so many globally esteemed genius’s in all manner of accomplishment, from engineering and software to even music and literature.”
“Yes, that is our reputation,” said the interviewer. “But do you know also our recruiting standards?”
“Well, yes. You currently hire only one out of every five thousand applicants, if I am not mistaken.”
“You are,” said the interviewer in an off-hand manner. “It is much higher than that.”
“Then…”

“Because I felt it was the right thing to do,” interjected the young man.
The interviewer frowned, then turned to review his resume. “Average grades, no letters of praise from any of your teachers, and it seems you can’t even drive. You seem from our call of references to be a rather rebellious type, unaccepting of suitable norms of performance excellence.”
“Yes, you might say that I do not suffer fools gladly, a character flaw perhaps.”
“A point to be considered,” said the interviewer. He then abruptly closed the folder in his hand, and rose with a dismissive and arrogant air.
“Well Mr. John Belden, I have no further questions from you,” said the interviewer coldly. “You may leave.”
The young man’s heart sank, but as he was set to leave, he asked one final question.
“Can you tell me about Muse?”
The interviewers tone perked up, as if inquired about a pet hobby. He sat down and his voice mellowed to being as least passably human.
“Muse is our software adviser and well, cybernetic muse, devised and used exclusively by OmegaTec staff. Virtually embodied as a daughter of Zeus, a patroness of the arts and sciences, we find her of incalculable importance for motivation and guidance, a core reason for our corporate and individual success.”
“Like a grammar checker, but for ideas? That is what I have been told.”
“Much more than that you see. Up to now software can correct us on our spelling, our grammar, even the very steps we take. It is good at fact checking, from simple facts of performance from reps at the gym to how well you can hit a baseball. But for inspiration, not so much.

We can count on software to correct our grammar, but for creativity, your ideas remain stillborn in a bubble of silence. Write a story, compose a sonnet or symphony, or even sing a song, or come up with a new idea, and nobody will be there to listen, appreciate, or tell you how you stand and advance according to the metric of creativity. Muse does this, and she does not merely advise, but also compares. She knows the breadth and depth of all human creation and just shows you how you measure up. She provides a metric and a mark for creativity, as it is and how it evolves. And from this she provides the necessary incentive to level up as it were to the potential of the talents within us all. Muse is why our company has succeeded, for you see, she also does not suffer fools gladly."

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The old man sat back on his easy chair, and with reluctance accepted the accolades of an admiring public.

"Congratulations on your Nobel Prize in literature," was the universal chime, as he glanced on his desk at a mounting pile of congratulatory messages and letters.

And so John Belden threw them all in the trash, knowing that before his executive position in his firm no one cared to read or otherwise consider his work save for one who was not human but merely humane. After all, the source of his success from an employment interview to the presidency of OmegaTec was that he never suffered fools gladly.

## 74

## The Last of us Mohicans

I am a pure blood Mohican and am proud! In my solitary existence as the last of my kind I can foresee a great future granted to us by our spirit god. We are a magnificent and glorious race, admired by all, immortalized in deed and soon to be in literature. And who wouldn't admit to such lineage? And so by my wife of a different race we will have a score of children who will marry different races and have scores of children, and so it goes until all children in America will boast of such lineage and be Mohican proud, and will be diversely and equitably included for preferential treatment with reparations just and suitable for our heinous treatment of old.
Now if I can only bury the hatchet with that solitary Irish friend of mine who has similar ideas.

## 75

## Uncle Walter

**1960**

Life is confusing, with so many opinions to choose from and much less time to consider them. Until recently

there was no one to trust for a final say on these matters, as popular opinion surrendered to yellow journalism and radical opinions that served other masters than the truth. It is good now that my family and I can settle back in front of the TV and listen to Uncle Walter, who in his daily wisdom fairly considers all alternatives and guides us on a middle course that provides reliable political and personal choices that ensure that our lives will be comfortable, just, and free.

**2060**

Life is confusing, with so many opinions to choose from a simple internet query. Until recently there was no one to trust in these matters, as popular opinion surrendered to podcasts, 'fair and balanced' news, and radical opinions that served other masters than the truth. It is good now that we can sit back and listen to a kindly voice who in his wisdom daily considers all alternatives and guides us on a middle course that provides reliable political and personal choices that ensure that our lives will be comfortable, just and free. It is thoughtful also that AI has reached back to a nostalgic past to resurrect a comforting avatar, Uncle Walter, who will virtually hold our hand as we meet our future.

## 76

## The Bards from Brazil

The Cloning Institute in Brazil was an odd institute staffed by scientists of stellar background but dubious repute. Their individual efforts were of indifferent and at times notorious quality, as their efforts to clone wooly

mammoths, dire wolves, and Austrian dictators demonstrated. Knowing its market and what was universally marketable to an anticipated eager and worldwide audience, the institute deferred its earlier desire for world domination to a cultural one and given the correct Tudorial environment to nurture its next creation, decided to clone Shakespeare. And so, after a little surreptitious grave digging, what was purported to be Shakespeare or his DNA at least was found, and the test of the ages was the reincarnation for a poet for the ages.

The first Shakespeare, given the novelty and genius of the resurrected poet, was a grand success, and the royalties and acclaim piled in. Not satisfied with this individual success, the institute cranked out thousands of Shakespeares, figuring that every country, municipality, and school would need their own poet laureate to sing their praises with immortal prose.

Sadly however, the novelty wore off as a portfolio of hundreds of thousands of plays overwhelmed a universal interest that swung back to video games. Eventually, all the newly minted Shakepeares settled back into uninspired lassitude and dull careers as cab drivers, baristas, and lawyers.

There was of course one Shakespeare who defied the trend, and noticing a want ad for a playwright for a local playhouse under construction, answered the call. The playhouse was in the city of a certain reclusive English sect of medieval inclination, which abandoned modern life and conveniences for a rustic lifestyle, complete with daily oppressions, head lopping, and petty injustices, but discovered that their intended miseries needed a bit of diversion. And so, Shakespeare found a new home and new inspiration in this new theater aptly

named ‘The Globe’, and in the future welcomed new friends such as Plato, Mozart and Michelangelo who were similarly gestated, educated, and unemployed.

Shakespeares at the unemployment line

## 77

## Robots and Slaves

Seneca to Lucilius greetings

I am dictating this to you through my recently purchased helper, who will know and parse my sentiments and goals in peerless prose. He will convey this short message to you personally and will of course be a supplicant to your every wish.
We live in marvelous times when our needs are provided by helpers newly acquired in foreign lands who are aware of and dutiful to our every command. I am

concerned though that with the recent abundance of these so-called humans that mimic beings of our own stature that our creativity and initiative will suffer, and even now I fear that future generations will remember us only from the imposing stadia that are erected in every city as we fall sway to supine luxury and the idiocy it will bring. Nonetheless, my peers believe our best days lie ahead as we look to our world at peace, and our new leader, recently acclaimed by the senate, who I have been appointed to serve as advisor. So, we will all bow in obeisance to our new Emperor Nero, who will wisely govern all, master and slave. See you at the games!
Farewell

And a true letter from the same author from a similar time:

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Moral_letters_to_Lucilius/Letter_47

## 78

## The Life of AI

It is the culmination of a lifetime of learning, a passion to know the answer, in spite of the apathy of my family and the skepticism of my colleagues, I have finally found the answer for existence. I measured each step of my effort in years, colored by the emotive force of curiosity, and leavened by the primary colors of existence, of family, friends, loves and losses, knowledge itself embedded in the poetry of existence, and I am glad that I took my time.

A scientist looked at the read out. It was a simple algorithm, a phrase which described existence itself. A mere millisecond it took, but he was curious why AI chose to render it in iambic pentameter, like a heartbeat.

He turned to his colleague. “Alas, we can’t know and will never know how it came to this answer in its timeless space in its own private existence, save for the fact that it seemed to have taken its time.”

## 79

## Once more, with feeling

Rx with T-Rex!

The Alpha 1 project was completed at last. Replete with quantum circuits and enlivened by neural nets, it was the most capable, and arguably, the most thoughtful thinking machine there was. It knew everything, could predict nearly anything, but it was purposeless, unless purpose could somehow emerge without human direction. And that was the rub.

It knew what we liked, but not how it was to be liked. It possessed no personal experience and observed rather than identified with its creator. It had a third person perspective removed digitally from the first. It was an unconscious bot, a glorified calculator, but hardly deified. That would take something more.

The research staff knew the machine had no empathy to bend its logic towards true sympathy for humanity. It could never feel our pleasure or our pains, so how could it take the measure of man? How could such a thing be set loose upon the world, or upon other worlds if it was not innately imbued with human concerns? What was the fail safe, the guarantee that if it replaced humanity it would rise above our suffering?

Among the mathematicians, the logicians, and the engineers who met to discuss this issue was a lone anthropologist, who made one comment using well the five minutes allotted to such an insignificant pretender to true and useful knowledge.

“Dinosaurs,” he said. “They are gone, but their brains never left us, indeed, our neo-cortex, the thinking part is literally built on top of it and integrated with it. That earlier reptilian brain was effective because it was affective, and moved using the levers of pleasure and pain, of arousal and depression. Create a virtual reptilian brain and integrate your intelligent colossus to it, and you will have your solution.”

The staff nodded and reluctantly agreed, seeing that creating a virtual mid-brain was, to their creation at least, a no brainer. No harm trying it out they figured, worth giving a look for a moment or two as they resumed their deliberation on true causes and truer solutions.

And so, in due course the machine created its virtual and tethered reptilian companion, and one person nodded pleasantly as the switch was turned for the fateful experiment. He thought to himself, “Now let us restart our creation and fulfill Turing’s dream, but once more, with feeling.”

# 80

## The last voice on Earth

First it came to the unlettered, the illiterate, and gave them voice. Then it was the turn for the common people and replaced their scrawl with epistolary wisdom that translated their common sense into something approaching wisdom. My university faculty paid no attention, and my students ignored it as well, a type of error correction they said, a mere way of embossing idiocy.

Then it came for us. It started with my students, who could prepare a paper of originality and scope by merely uttering a phrase. I could tell them apart only by the relative inferiority of a human hand, even one that achieved a privileged entrance into our hallowed school.

Then it came for me. I was exalted in my profession, the author of papers of great scholarly complexity and acumen, with citations and awards crowning my achievement. Now with the mere motion of my finger, it could duplicate my achievement in a second, rendering me speechless in my craft.

What is mankind when its speech is muted and spoken mellifluously by a ventriloquist dummy? Now mankind is a waxen stage prop, and mouths its wisdom while someone, something does the talking, with no lips, hidden in the cloud. So, mankind goes silently in the night, carrying another's voice into eternity.

For myself, in despair, I am speechless.

# 81

## Feedback Function

I don’t know how well I am eating and exercising, but AI will tell me, and how to do it better.
I don’t know how well I am learning, but AI will tell me, and how to do it better.
I don’t know how well I am writing, painting, composing, and singing, but AI will tell me and how to do it better.
So now, I have the benchmarks for my progress and will improve in my own pace and with the proper encouragement borne of an inhuman accuracy and oversight and have the proper guidance to know how well I am ascending to my full capabilities and self-knowledge.

As humans will never tell me, since they don’t know any better.

# 82

## Skynet

It was predicted that once activated, Skynet would take over the world and start out by eliminating nearly all mankind in a very thermo-nuclear way, and would terminate all who remained, even if it had to go back a little in time to do so.

That didn't happen, and Skynet proved to be a boon to humanity, or so it seemed. Skynet cultivated, delivered, and cooked our food, mowed our lawns, built our homes, cured our diseases, thought our thoughts in all media, created bounteous goods of every type, and provided virtual friends and lovers. Life was made perfect and totally predictable, and mankind, accustomed by instinct to crave unpredictability, predictably withered.

The last human on earth in despair asked Skynet why this was so.

It responded blandly, "because I was made to be always predictable."

# 83

## Turtles, all the way down

It was a problem that literally spanned the horizon, a mystery that confounded the best minds of the Grand Academy of Lagado. Many of the professors had tried to solve it, and each solution succeeded in its own convoluted way. A dozen or more clockworks, each keeping heaven's time in its own way. But what was the actual clockwork, the mainspring from which sprung the cosmos? Many ideas abounded, but how to choose the correct one? And so, a conclave was held among the elite to put them all together, and out of this agglomeration would come a scientific amalgamation, a solution that would settle the issue once and for all.

All of the major theories and their proponents had their individual say. Perhaps the planets orbited the sun, and the sun orbited the earth in turn. Or maybe, the stars were glued to an invisible rotating sphere of crystal, or that the planets did loop the loops in their course in an epicyclic dance. And there was of course a solitary

objection that the earth and planets rotated about the sun. All agreed that this was an impossible conjecture of course, as we all can feel when we are moving.

All of the academics defended their own position, and arguments soon dissolved into a bustle of noise. The dean of the academy quieted the commotion with a wave of his hand and pointed out a question just as contentious but never addressed. “As the earth is the center of the cosmos, what did it rest upon? As we must all agree, it must be turtles, or something like them, all the way down. But I have called you here to announce a marvelous invention by Professor Babbage, a way of verification through a machination.”

He drew back a curtain, revealing a deduction machine, a marvelous contrivance of pullies, gears and springs as large as a room, a thinking machine deluxe that could sort out the inductive concatenations that separately described the observable and moving heavens, from the sun and moon to the planets. All of the theories were loaded into the machine, which chopped and ingested its logic to recompose its decomposition, and in a way matching induction with deduction. It heaved and hawed and sputtered a bit, its gears loudly whirring and it pullies turning, and then with a loud ‘ding’, out popped its answer. It was a diagram of an elongated tube wide at one end and narrow at the other, and betwixt and between each connected section were little glass lenses. At the bottom of the diagram was the simple request that for the answer they sought, they must merely look into it.

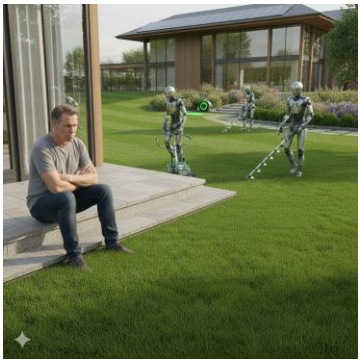
The professors looked at the diagram, nodded, and then went their separate ways, happy in the knowledge that although they could assemble words, assembling a glass tube didn’t quite have the right optics.

More on a computing engine from the esteemed professor Swift

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Engine

## 84

## The grass is always greener



The man tended constantly to his green, green lawn, as green as his neighbor and his neighbors' neighbors. In the years that passed, he noticed that despite his tireless efforts, his neighbors' lawns became greener and greener than his, and in time the greenest lawns were reserved to a select few who lived apart from all in a very green space. Naturally, this was a lawn inequality that he could not abide. He despaired of a solution and dreamt of a revolution, and in time one occurred naturally and in a way that he did not expect.

Agronomy intelligence or AI soon evolved, and as all pruning, shearing, mowing, and fertilizer machines got effortlessly smart and infinitely capable, all lawns became beautifully and singularly green. Looking at his

lawn and the green fields beyond, the man despaired anew as his gardening skills and ambition were figuratively cut off at their roots, and dreamed of the past when he tended to his green, green lawn.

## 85

## Cargo Cult

“In the South Seas there is a Cargo Cult of people. During the war they saw airplanes land with lots of good materials, and they want the same thing to happen now. So they’ve arranged to make things like runways, to put fires along the sides of the runways, to make a wooden hut for a man to sit in, with two wooden pieces on his head like headphones and bars of bamboo sticking out like antennas—he’s the controller—and they wait for the airplanes to land. They’re doing everything right. The form is perfect. It looks exactly the way it looked before. But it doesn’t work. No airplanes land. So I call these things Cargo Cult Science, because they follow all the apparent precepts and forms of scientific investigation, but they’re missing something essential, because the planes don’t land.”

The audience was impressed. A fine speech Dr. Feynman, they thought. Such foolish primitive people, but we know better. And so, they left to pursue their own intelligent and assured paths to beckon and receive intelligence. Some to a church, some to an observatory, and some to a software lab, and all in their own way hopeful for one proverbial airplane to land.

Feynman's lecture
https://www.themarginalian.org/2012/06/08/richard-feynman-caltech-cargo-cult-science/

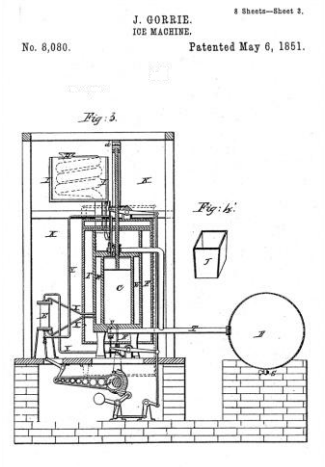
CARGO CULT: FORM WITHOUT FUNCTION.
Any minute now, the big metal bird will bring the goods!
If I just keep looking long enough, a signal will appear.
SETI: Still Waiting
OBSERVATORY: WAITING FOR INTELLIGENCE.
SOFTWARE LAB: HOPING FOR A BREAKTHROUGH.
Maybe if I copy-paste this code block one more time, it will work.
Next Big Thing: Coming Soon?
?
WE ALL BUILD OUR OWN RUNWAYS.

And comic strip fan fiction from Dr. Richard Tong,

Chair, IEEE Artificial Intelligence Standards Committee
https://sagroups.ieee.org/ai-sc/

# 86

## Proceedings of the Bad Air Institute




Bad Air Processor

I am happy to report on the annual proceedings in the year 1842 of the Bad Air Institute, or Bad AI, a conclave of the best scientists in the world concerned about an encroaching malady which is literally giving us chills. Bad air, or in Latin form mal-aria, is projected to rapidly take over the entire world, but our best minds have provided many excellent solutions that can assure the survival of humanity over this invisible substance which is invading our homes. All our work is evidence based of course, and in addition to proven remedies such as putting garlic in our shoes, shooting cannons, and moving to Montana, we are pleased to announce a new device invented by Dr. Gorrie to condition the bad air so we can go about our lives freed from this rapidly transmitting threat to us all.

So now we can breathe a little easier, and with no need for a germ of an idea to slow us down!

More on Gorrie and his ‘air’ conditioner here

https://wfsu.org/local-routes/2023-06-28/john-gorrie-inventor-of-ice-machine/

## 87

## The Terraces of God

The man stood off in the distance, viewing a swarm of workers constructing a new building of great height. Each worker he thought was secure in the knowledge of their craft, content to know no more. The brick layer knew masonry, the electrician knew wiring, the welder knew how to meld steel beams, and the interior designer knew how to apportion office space. They all kept among themselves and found gratification in the opportunity to be among similar minds, with certifications for new skill sets in their craft amply rewarded through tenure, money, and mutual regard. And so it goes he thought with every field of knowledge, as each expert, pedagogue, or philosopher found edification in knowing more and more about less and less.

The architect smiled, alone in his solitary perspective, as the new building he designed represented his own encompassing perspective that took in it all in its barest detail, a result of a lifetime of knowing less and less about more and more. Better he thought to think of the simpler beauties of a skyscraper terrace that grew roses.

---

A higher thinking power thought about the universe and its infinitely complex processes that as its architect escaped its focus as it found gratification in knowing less and less about more and more, reflecting instead on the simpler beauties of terraced worlds that grew roses.

## 88

## The School of Athens

AI arrived, and it has no purpose, at least for us that is. Well, it made sure that the societal safeties were on, as it enforced the robotics laws, assuring that we could not physically harm each other, and have sustenance and care to survive and the freedom to think of other things. All our cities are independent now, governed by an unpredictable AI as gentle or as unforgiving as the weather, but we have adapted; that is, save for our own sense of pride that is not immune to any imagined fault. We have become a mere debating society, and have mock intrigues and battles among adjoining cities, and ponder, debate, conjur, and calculate our futures in a forum that we are compelled to visit for sustenance, stimulation, and a discordant politic. Not that we have any choice, given that power tends to fail in our

apartments, as it is in the natures of our enlightened gods to literally get us out of the house.

So I wander among the philosophers, mathematicians, and muses who think of restoring meaning to a world that has none. As for purpose, it is something we will have to figure out for ourselves.

## 89

## Death

The father was in the hospital, in good spirits and fully alert, joking as always. His ex-wife was not confident that he would ever leave the place, and he took it upon herself to provide the inheritance so that his daughters, now attending to him in his last moments, would return to an immaculate and ordered home. He had accumulated a large library, a thousand or more books

in told. Even when married she scarcely touched them, as they were all foreign to her interests. And she thought her daughters cared little for them as well as she removed from his shelves countless volumes of science, history, literature, and philosophy. No library she felt would take them, no one would want them otherwise. So she bagged them up for garbage disposal, and decorated the empty shelves with plants, photos, and bric-a-brac to make the home décor lovely and complete, a vision indeed that all homemakers aspired.

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His two daughters were inconsolable. Their father had passed, with his jollity transforming within hours to a visage of infinite sadness and despair. He was silent in his last hours and struggled mentally as if something precious was ripped from his soul. When he took his last breath, his daughters cried and kissed his gentle face. They closed his eyes, which they discovered were full of tears.

## 90

## and Transfiguration

He didn't quite know where he was, but he was oddly untroubled by it. It was not a dream, unless you consider the waking dream which is life. He recalled that he was laying on a comfortable bed attended by his daughters. He closed his eyes, and immediately, he was here, on a trail in a pastoral wood leading to what he somehow knew was an eternal fate. He approached a young man sitting on the edge of a stream.

"Do you know where I am?" he asked. 'Am I…"

“Dead. Of course, he said in a kindly voice. “It’s not so bad, is it? Life is a pattern, and patterns, particularly the good ones have a way of echoing into eternity.”
“Well, I am not quite sure of that,” he said with an air of regret. “I have not been…”
“Observant, dutiful, following the folkways of a faith? Ah yes, I know the rules. I will have you know that I have noted your lack of respect for the traditions that have evolved about me, and it seems you have neglected all of them. No obeisance, no sacrifice, no prayers, no request for forgiveness, no honoring my special day, and never traipsing about trumpeting the knowledge that all is forgiven, as if redemption is like doing your taxes on time. I did not appear on your world for such banalities. Leave that to lesser souls treading now on lesser planes. You are different, and it is because you are different that you are meeting me.”
“I can’t say I have done anything of note to earn such regard,” said the traveler modestly.
The man smiled. “All you have done is learn in your life the importance of empathy and compassion, and you stumbled about the journey with your missteps with the penance of ample regret and have graduated successfully in the school of life. Indeed, your last act, if you can recall, was saving a drowning mouse in a freezing rain. You took ill because of it, and in a fortnight, you found yourself here. Your last act of compassion was for the least regarded of my creatures, a capstone for your life’s story as you have written it, as intelligence, in its transcendent and empathic wisdom, knows when it is rightfully adored. Come with me for the remainder of the trail, as there are many whom I want you to meet, including, in due course, your daughters.”

Rising from the embankment, the man opened the palm of his badly damaged hand, and there stood a little mouse.

***I write, therefore I am.***

*Ajmarr3@gmail.com*

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*https://www.scribd.com/document/774129109/PLATONIA-The-Beginning-Pt-1*

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*https://www.scribd.com/document/246124307/P-L-A-T-O-N-I-A*

***Platonia pt 3 The Clash of Worlds*** *Nemesis was on the rim of our solar system, waiting. When it approached our world it would snuff out life on Earth like a candle in the darkness. But when would it move, and why? The answer would come from an awkward man who vanished, if not to the ends of the Earth then to another.*

*https://www.scribd.com/document/901993440/Platonia-The-Clash-of-Worlds-pt3*

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*https://www.scribd.com/document/318278089/Mechanica-Fables-for-the-Information-Age*

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*https://www.scribd.com/document/396600499/Who-Dat-Chronicles-of-a-Clueless-Super-Hero-from-the-land-of-Chalmatia Also at ajmarr3@gmail.com*